HINDUISM: ESSENCE AND CONSEQUENCE

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A Study of the Upanishads, the Gita and the Brahma-Sutras



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For our darling
Anita
from Adit and me—
two who could not have survived
without her
love and strength

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INTRODUCTION

Gandhiji used to say that we should look upon texts like the Gita as the works of poets, the works of great poets, true, but none the less just the works of poets. The texts as we now possess them, he used to say, have been through centuries of interpolation, distortion, deletion and distillation. We do not even know, he said, that a *Rishi* named Manu ever lived. So unsatisfactory did he find their state to be that he suggested that we bring out a revised edition of the scriptures.

At one level this essay is an attempt to sketch out some of the reasons that may lead a sensitive individual like Gandhiji to conclusions such as these.

The essay is an exegesis of the *prasthana-treyi*—the 108 Upanishads, the *Bhagvad Gita* and the *Brahma-Sutras*—that is, of the triad on which our philosophical tradition rests. Much in these texts is profound. Much in them is sound practical advice. But much in them is just nonsense. At another level, therefore, this essay is an attempt to sketch the consequences of a good thing being carried too far.

The basic purpose of the essay, however, is to bare aspects of these texts which for centuries have provided convenient rationalizations for the existing state of affairs and which have helped reinforce the state of affairs.

Much in the essay will offend the orthodox, much will be regarded as blasphemous. At a time when many are seeking to aggrandize their position by setting themselves up as the guardians of our heritage and abusing the work of others, it may be that this essay too will invite their compliments.

Reflecting on the reception that his proposal for bringing out a revised edition of the scriptures was certain to receive at the hands of the orthodox, Gandhiji said, "The certainty that the whole mass of Hindus and the persons accepted as religious leaders will not accept the validity of such authority need not interfere with the sacred enterprise. Work done sincerely and in the spirit of service will have its effect on all in the long run and will most assuredly help those who are badly in need of such assistance."

While this is a puny essay compared to "the sacred enterprise" he envisaged, I draw strength from the Mahatma's assurance.

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WHY PHILOSOPHY?

Observers have often pointed out that the Hindu tradition is other-worldly. I believe that in doing so they have missed the point. The purposes of the Hindu tradition as well as its consequences are very much of this world.

The tradition crystallized when our modes of production were primitive. The production system and, therefore, the society was not integrated. People lived in geographically isolated communities with only sporadic, infrequent contacts with each other. Within a community also the productive activities of one unit—a person, a family—were not greatly dependent on those of another.

In such a community force cannot be used directly and frequently. Rule must be maintained not by direct domination, not by the overt use of coercion but, as Gramsci would say, through "hegemony," through "a permanently organized consent," a consent whose organization is left to private initiative and thus appears to the observer as well as to the subject as having been voluntarily given.[1]

This hegemony is established by means of an ideology, a world-view that is anchored in each individual and is one that reproduces itself permanently.

The key to success here is internalization. The ideology must become, as Horkheimer would say, "an interiorized force," an "external law taken into the psyche itself," so that "culture becomes nature and the individual learns to affirm and to reproduce the reality principle from within himself through his instincts."[2] The elements of the world-view must be so internalized that they acquire an imperative character in determining conduct, so that they become, to pluck Marx's apt expression, a material force.

Once these notions have been internalized by the populace, the rulers need no longer be overtly violent. The subjects do not perceive the constraints, they do not perceive the lack of empirical freedom, they even regard the lack of it as a "good thing," as a pre-condition for "inner freedom." To the extent that each subject represses himself, to the extent that each succeeds in hypnotizing himself, he does the work of the rulers for them.

Such a system, overtly non-violent, overtly tolerant, is, as Gramsci notes, much harder to break for it does not admit of any overt attack.

[1] A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1971, p. 80.

[2] Herbert Marcuse, "Freedom and Freud's Theory of Instincts," in *Five Lectures*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1970, p. 11.

The ideological superstructure of ancient India represents one of the most highly articulated, one of the best worked-out hegemonic systems. The world-view was highly developed, its myriad elements were worked out in fine detail, each element perfected to reinforce the others. And with the world-view went an elaborate and fully-perfected mode for ensuring—through rules of family life, ritual, religion and social conduct—that the details were internalized. The world-view developed early in our history and, as the base did not change much, the society had literally millenia in which to work out and perfect its details as well as the methods by which it was to be internalized.

From the point of view of establishing hegemony—or from that of breaking out of it—the key elements of the world-view that need to be manipulated are three: man's view of nature, man's view of the social world—using the word "social" in its comprehensive sense to cover all of man's relations with his fellow men—and man's view of man himself.

It is quite obvious that man's conduct *vis-a-vis* nature will be different if he has internalized the view that the natural, empirical world, the world of wood and stone, just does not exist, than if he has internalized the view that, while it does exist, it is subject to unknowable and capricious laws. His conduct would differ even more if the view he has internalized is neither of the above but the view that the laws are knowable though uncontrollable or the view that the laws are both knowable as well as manipulable or the view that not only are the laws knowable and manipulable, but that they can be used by man to autonomously create relationships (whether these be alloys or engineered genes) that do not exist in nature at all.

Similarly, man's conduct would be very different if he recognizes the social world for what it is—a man-made social world—than if he views it as being an aspect of nature itself, as embodying eternal relationships that are beyond his control, relationships that have a superhuman sanction, a divine legitimacy.

Nor need we argue at length that man's conduct *vis-a-vis* nature as well as the social world will be affected by his view of himself. He is unlikely to use his creative potential to mould and smash and remould either nature or the social world if he has convinced himself that he is an inadequate, puny, subordinate, isolated being; he is liable to do even less about the world around him if he has convinced himself that he is an abstraction, that he is not the empirical being of flesh and blood but an undefinable, noncorporeal "essence."

These aspects of the consciousness of a people can be gleaned in many ways. We may, for instance, glean them in the rituals—social and religious—a people live by. We may glean them in the popular literature—the myths and legends, the folk-tales—of a people.

They can be seen, as if in a crystal, in the philosophical tradition of a people. For philosophy is, as Marx notes in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, nothing but religion—and, in a sense, life itself—rendered into thoughts and thinkingly expounded.

Philosophy and the world-view which influences a people's conduct stand in a dialectical relationship to each other. Thinkers, the official ideologists of the era, extract and formulate generalizations from the daily lives of the people—from the problems they face, the solutions they adopt. After passing through many successive steps of abstraction these generalizations become what we conventionally term as "philosophy." The philosophical propositions in their turn affect conduct even though they, in the abstruse formulations of the professional dialecticians, are not understood by the people. Just as our daily, empirical lives went through successive abstractions to become philosophical propositions, the latter now go through successive steps of vulgarization and enter the conduct of a people in the vulgar form. Ever so often one hears an illiterate peasant use some phrase, "*aji sub maya hai*," a sort of mental switch by which he shuts off his thinking process, and one is struck by its direct correspondence to some profound philosophical proposition that lies buried in some esoteric texts. Moreover, philosophy and these esoteric texts provide *the ground for* the rulers and their official ideologists as they go about their task of having the populace rationalize, accept and internalize the empirical order in which it finds itself trapped. The rulers and the ideologists do not use esoteric philosophical propositions to convince the common folk. They use the vulgar and, as we shall see, distorted forms. But the fact that the esoteric texts exist, the fact that the lineal ancestors of the vulgar propositions can be shown to exist in the texts, is a great help: "It has all been explained in the Upanishads," they maintain. The less read the Upanishads are, the better for the rulers: for that makes it that much easier for them to attribute anything that suits them to those texts, to derive the convenient from them.

Our philosophical tradition is a specially useful crystal in the Indian case. As modern Indian commentators never tire of pointing out, speculation, theory and practice—including in the last one's religious, personal and social life—have been very closely integrated in India.

Thus, I shall be viewing philosophy not as revelation, not as a spontaneous eruption in isolated, solitary minds but as an aspect of the official ideology of an era. My concern will be to bare what it is in our philosophical tradition which would have helped the ruling class and which, unless jettisoned, will continue to do so, whatever the ruling class of the day.

The philosphers, as Marx would say, mystified the world by converting questions of this world into theological questions. Our task is to de-mystify philosophy by converting theological questions into questions of this world.

WHICH PHILOSOPHY?

A philosophical tradition helps us answer two questions: first, why has this tradition come to prevail in this particular society and not in another one; that is, what can we infer from the philosophical tradition about the society in which it has come to prevail; and, second, what consequences will the tradition have for the society in which it has become dominant?

Both questions are interesting as well as vital. The first is vital because we know so little about ancient India that all circumstantial evidence cannot but be welcome and also because, as is often pointed out, Indian history represents a continuum; what we learn about the past while answering the question will help us understand the present also. The second question is equally interesting and vital because, in the Indian case even more conspicuously than in other cases, philosophy, religion and life have had intimate relations, one to the other; indeed they have formed aspects of a whole.

Now, as is well known, we have had many different "schools" of philosophy in India, each differentiating its point of view sharply from that of the others, each engaging in contentious, acrimonious, often abusive debates with all the others, debates that have lasted over millenia.

The primary philosophical literature is itself very large—it runs into thousands of volumes—and it is marked by innumerable contradictions. The commentaries are many times the number of the original texts and, as in almost every case the commentators were advocating a partisan point of view and not just trying to elucidate what the original texts had said, they have added shades without number to the original viewpoints.

The existence of so many and such varied schools is an important fact in itself. It is a reflection, among other things, of the fact that for millenia our communities lived in relative isolation with only infrequent contacts with each other. While there are records of debates among the adherents of different schools and while the writings of a Ramanuja show an almost obsessive preoccupation with refuting the standpoint of a Shankara, all the schools have survived all the debates. Throughout the course of our history the philosophical tradition was not welded into one philosophy just as the life of different communities was not welded into one life.

The existence of this variety of schools and of the mountains of contradictory assertions, deductions, viewpoints is grist for my mill. Apart from the fact that the continuance of these contradictions over the millenia will

itself figure in my argument, the reader can imagine how much easier the task of documenting his argument is for an author if he has this vast amount of contentious material to choose from.

But, so as not to lose the wood for the trees, I will disregard the differing viewpoints of these schools altogether. Instead, I will work directly with the Upanishads, the *Gita* and the *Brahma-Sutras*. As is well known, these together constitute the *prasthana-treyi*, the triad on which our philosophical tradition rests.

It is in the Upanishads that the philosophical potential inherent in the groping hymns of the Vedas was developed. In this sense the Upanishads truly are the *Vedanta*—the end of the Vedas. Moreover, all schools of Hindu philosophy—including the school of the worldly ones, the Charvaks—derive their particular doctrine from the Upanishads.

The *Muktikopanishad* tells us that the four Vedas had 1,180 *shakhas*—the *Rig-Veda* had twenty-one, the *Yajur-Veda* 109, the *Sama-Veda* 1,000 and the *Atharva-Veda* 50—and that each of these *shakhas* had an *Upanishad* of its own. Of these 1,180 Upanishads, 108 have survived. These are the texts that I will use most to document my argument.

The *Gita* is in a class by itself. It is an eclectic work; in a sense it brings together the various standpoints expressed in the Upanishads. But while this is an important enough reason for using it, my primary reason for doing so is the unique importance that the *Gita* has had in the minds of men like Tilak, Gandhi and Aurobindo, men who have had such a lot to do with putting us on our feet again.

The *Brahma-Sutras* are 554 telegraphic aphorisms. They are meant to clarify and elucidate the doctrine of the Upanishads and the *smriti*. I shall refer to them occasionally, particularly in Chapter 8 where I shall consider the information content of many of the central concepts of the tradition. As the aphorisms are highly condensed, elliptical statements, I shall also have occasion to refer extensively to two well-known commentaries on them, those of Shankaracharya and Ramanuja.

During the course of the argument numerous passages from these texts will have to be reproduced. In fact, the first half of this book consists almost entirely of passages from the Upanishads and the *Gita*. Some of the citations will appear repetitive. Some may appear to be unusually lengthy. But the reader must persevere; he must wade through them. If nothing else, the repetitive passages will acquaint him with an important device of the compilers of the Upanishads and similar texts—the device of repeating basic propositions endlessly so that the mere act of reading the texts carts the propositions into the mind.

The only circumstance in which I could have left the passages out would have been one in which I had reason to believe that everyone reading this essay would be completely familiar with the texts themselves. As things stand, it is probably safer to presume the opposite, to presume complete unfamiliarity rather than complete familiarity with the texts. Such is our state that while we can probably reel off a good bit about the latest trends in

American and European literature, while we can reel off much about the work of modern Western poets and philosophers, we know little about our own tradition. What we know, we know second-hand. Indeed, this is one of the principal reasons on account of which the excrescences of our tradition—some of which I will illustrate as we go along—have survived unchallenged so long.

This is true even of texts such as the Upanishads. So much in them is just chaff and yet it has survived centuries. A critical mind, in fact just an open mind, reading these texts could not but have spotted these portions. But few read the texts. Most of those who read them seem to have been mere enthusiasts for whom doubt, questioning were heresy. Others—specially those writing primarily for Western or Western-trained audiences in the last 100 years—were labouring at a time when our principal preoccupation was to rehabilitate our pride in ourselves and in our heritage. This was an extremely important and legitimate objective. But it had one inevitable consequence—the commentaries turned out to be hagiographies. We slurred over what was inconvenient. That phase and that need have passed. Today the need is to examine the tradition, to separate the kernel from the shell.

Unfortunately, the texts remain largely unread today. And this is the principal reason on account of which we continue to hold them in superstitious reverence.

As they are unread, I have no option but to reproduce in each instance at least a few passages to give the reader a flavour of what it is that I am talking about. I did consider at one stage the option of merely referring to the passages rather than reproducing them. But I could not muster up the confidence that the reader would actually take the trouble of looking the passages up for himself; indeed there was the distinct possibility that he would dismiss the references as mere pedantry! Moreover, I soon realized that even if the reader decided to look them up, he would have considerable difficulty in doing so. There are few public libraries even in our metropolitan areas where he can find, for instance, a set of all the Upanishads.

Finally, I perceive a tactical advantage in reproducing the passages *in extensio*: as much of what I have to say about the tradition is critical, it is best to let the texts speak for themselves.

After considering various alternative presentations—e.g., of putting the citations in annexures and the like—I have settled for incorporating them in the text itself but indenting them. In Chapters 3 to 5, which consist almost entirely of passages from the texts, the reader may first flip the pages to glance through the unindented type alone and then return to read through the passages. But read them he must.

There is, therefore, no way around the numerous citations, I am afraid. And now that they are being reproduced, I do hope the reader will not rush past them. I will be greatly handicapped, my argument will seem much less plausible than it is, if he were to do so. Far from being too many, the passages have been kept to a minimum. While I cannot guarantee that there are no exceptions, in general I can assure the reader that where one passage

has been cited, at least a score additional ones could have been selected along with it.

"But why are you using all the 108 Upanishads? After all, only a few of them are regarded as the major Upanishads. Why not confine yourself to these alone?"

There is no standard list of what is major and what is minor among the Upanishads. Traditionally, *ten or eleven are regarded as the major Upanishads*, on the ground that these were the ones on which Shankaracharya commented. As can be expected this criterion is not acceptable to all. Would a Ramanuja accept it? The obvious answer is a loud "no." When it suits his purpose Ramanuja does not hesitate to quote, for instance, the *Garbhopanishad*. Ramanuja's aversion to Shankara apart, would the devotees of Shiva, Shakti and Vishnu agree to a list that left out *their* particular Upanishads? And are these devotees any less a part of our tradition than a Shankara?

My argument would be no weaker if it were made to rest on the "major" Upanishads alone, on the Upanishads on which, say, Shankara commented. Indeed, if anything it would be stronger as its presentation would be more compact. As I shall argue, the world-view implicit in, for instance, the sectarian Upanishads is no different from the world-view that underlies the "major" Upanishads. Citations from them, therefore, only result in some repetition. They do not introduce elements that would have been totally missing had we confined ourselves to the "major" Upanishads. On occasion a point is spelt out clearly and more elaborately in one of these non-major Upanishads. The latter are, on occasion, wordier as well as more candid. This is an advantage for us; with the help of these later Upanishads we can at once see what some of the elliptical passages of the earlier Upanishads meant, in particular what the tradition itself took them to mean. In the next chapter itself the reader will see how helpful a wordy and repetitive Upanishad like the *Tejo-Bindu* is in this respect. We should not forgo this substantial advantage that accrues from viewing the major and non-major Upanishads together.

It has been my frequent experience that if one documents an assertion by referring to eleven Upanishads, the orthodox react by saying "okay, but what about the views expressed in the remaining ninety-seven?" And if one documents the assertion by referring to those eleven as well as to others, the orthodox react by saying, "But why are you bringing these peripheral texts into the argument? Who says they are important?"

The point is that many regard them to be just as important as—in fact, in many instances *more* important than—the major Upanishads. So long as the tradition does not itself evolve a way of winnowing the list, all the Upanishads must be treated as admissible evidence. Similarly, so long as the tradition does not itself evolve a way of purging any single Upanishad of passages which some might now find inconvenient, *each* passage must be regarded as admissible evidence, as being no less important, no less of a revelation than any other passage.

For these reasons I have felt it safer to err on the side of comprehen-

siveness. Repetition is a small price to pay to keep the reader from dismissing what I have to say with the shrug, "The argument may be all right as far as the eleven Upanishads go, but would it stand if we took account of the other ninety-seven?"

Now, as I mentioned earlier and as the reader doubtless knows, there is no single tradition that one can call *the* Hindu *tradition*, much less *the Indian* tradition. It turns out that the view I shall be using as the main paradigm is close to what is conventionally known as the Advaita view. I believe that this view is the one that dominates the Upanishads and, therefore, I will use it as the scaffolding for my argument.

I am well aware—and, therefore, do not need to be reminded—that the Advaita view is but one of the views that has been put forward by our philosophers. A plausible case can be made out for the proposition that it has been the dominant view in the Indian tradition. In a detour I will be arguing later that the Advaita view underlies, for instance, the sectarian Upanishads too. But I will not argue this matter out in detail. Establishing one view or another as having been the dominant one is not my purpose and I would hope that the reader will not dismiss my argument with the defensive shrug; "Ah, ha, what you say may be true about the Advaita view but, surely, it is just one of the many views put forward by our philosophers."

The argument as to what is or is not *the* Hindu view, much less *the Indian* view, cannot, I am convinced, be settled to anyone's satisfaction. The reader should take it, therefore, that I am not claiming to argue about *the* Hindu view but about a world-view that has figured prominently in texts that we have held in superstitious reverence. Instead of arguing whether the Advaita view is indeed the dominant one or not, I would hope that we can agree about the inferences that are drawn from this particular view, inferences about the consequences that it would have for a society in which it is internalized, about the ways in which it would serve the ruling classes.

3

THE ESSENCE: BRAHMAN, MAN AND THE WORLD

The Upanishads maintain that the Brahman *is*, that the Brahman alone *is*. They maintain that the Brahman—the Ultimate Reality—is without parts, it is undifferentiated, that it is non-corporeal, a pure consciousness. Furthermore, man, they affirm, is not the corporeal being of flesh and blood; he is the non-corporeal self—the Atman—which, in turn, is the Brahman. Now, as all is Brahman, as Brahman is an undifferentiated entity and as this undifferentiated entity is non-corporeal, as it is pure consciousness, the empirical world of wood and stone, with its manifest diversity, must necessarily be non-existent and all notions to the contrary must be nothing more than delusions.

In this chapter I shall recall some of the very many passages of the Upanishads in which this view is elaborated. In the next we shall see that this is also the view which underlies the sectarian Upanishads—the Upanishads of the Vaishnavas, the Shaivites and the Shaktas. We shall see that these sectarian Upanishads merely present, as a commentator has observed, the Advaita doctrine in disguise.[1]

BRAHMAN

The first step consists in the affirmation that Brahman is an undifferentiated, non-qualified unity.

> That Brahman is without prior or posterior, without interior or exterior. . . .[2]

> As a lump of salt is without interior or exterior, entire and purely saline in taste, even so is the Self without interior or exterior. . . .[3]

> . . .There is no diversity whatever in It. . . .[4]
> . . .that which is one only, without a counterpart, that surely is the Brahman. There is no scope whatsoever for the many here.[5]

[1]A.G. Krishna Warrier, *The Shakta Upanishads*, Adyar Library & Research Centre, Madras, 1967, pp. x-xi.
[2]*Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, 2. 5. 19.
[3]*Ibid.*, 4.5. 13.
[4]*Ibid.*, 4.4. 19.
[5]*Adhyatmopanishad*, 64.

He who does not deviate from this changeless state, through the operation of factors such as place, time, and substance, who is connotable by the term 'that,' is known as the *Paramatman*. Possessed of no differentiating mark, connotable by the term 'Thou'. . . that is known as the *Para-Brahman*.[6]

That alone is the Brahman which is divisionless, non-differentiated and untinged.[7]

The one Being is divided out of delusion, on account of Illusion and not in its real form. Hence there is only non-dualism. . . .[8]

Difference and non-difference and the distinction between the two, there is not for the Brahman. Beyond the Self there is its own Self always. . . .[9]

He who sees all things as non-differentiated, on account of their close relationship with consciousness, he alone is the actual man of knowledge of the Brahman, he is Shiva, he is Hari, and also Brahman.[10]

As an enjoyer of righteousness, He covers Himself with a veil made of qualities; (but) He remains fixed—yes, He remains fixed.[11]

Higher than the Unmanifest, however, is the Person.
All-pervading and without any mark whatever.
Knowing which, a man is liberated.
And goes to immortality.[12]

The one God, hidden in all things,
All-pervading, the Inner Soul of all things,
The overseer of deeds, in all things abiding,
The witness, the sole thinker, devoid of qualities.[13]

It is without parts, action, change, defect, virtue and vice; It is the supreme bridge leading to immortality; and It is like fire that has burnt out its fuel.[14]

The *Brahma-Sutras* summarize affirmations of this kind by declaring, "not even according to place can Brahman have a two-fold characteristic for everywhere (It is taught to be without parts or attributes),"[15] that the differences in Him that are occasionally mentioned in the Upanishads are

[6] *Sarva Saropanishad*, 13-14.
[7] *Amrita-Bindupanishad*, 7-10.
[8] *Darshanopanishad*, X 1-5.
[9] *Pashupatabrahmopanishad*, *Uttar-Kanda*, 21-31.
[10] *Varahopanishad*, II 63.
[11] *Maitreyopanishad*, II. 7.
[12] *Kathopanishad*, VI. 8.
[13] *Shvetashvatara*, VI. 11.
[14] *Ibid.*, 6.9.
[15] *Brahma-Sutras*, 3.2.11.

each negated individually,[16] that formlessness of Brahman is "the dominant note" of the Upanishads,[17] that the apparent differences are like the reflections of the single sun in different pots.[18]

The undifferentiated, non-qualified nature of the Brahman is driven home again and again by listing the qualities that do *not* characterize Him. In each instance the list of qualities is merely illustrative for the point that is being made is not that Brahman does not have the particular qualities that happen to have been listed in the particular passage, but that He does not have *any* qualities whatsoever.

Thus, to cite just a few examples:

> . . . He said: 'That, O Gargi, Brahmanas call the Imperishable. It is not coarse, not fine, not short, not long, not glowing (like fire), not adhesive (like water), without shadow, and without darkness, without air and without space, without thickness (intangible), odorless, tasteless, without eye, without ear, without voice, without wind, without energy, without breath, without mouth, (without personal or family name, unaging, undying, without fear, immortal, stainless, not uncovered, not covered), without measure, without inside and without outside. . . .'"[19]

> . . . That Soul is not this, it is not that (*neti-neti*). It is unseizable, for it is not seized. It is indestructible, for it is not destroyed. It is unattached, for it does not attach itself. It is unbound. It does not tremble. It is not injured. . . ."[20]

> . . . What is soundless, touchless, formless, imperishable,
> Likewise tasteless, constant, odorless,
> Without beginning, without end, higher than the great, stable,
> By discerning That, one is liberated from the mouth of death. . . .[21]

> . . . That is the Soul free from evil, ageless, deathless, sorrowless, hungerless, thirstless, whose desire is the Real, whose conception is the Real.[22]

> . . . That which is invisible, ungraspable, without family, without caste,
> Without sight or hearing is It, without hand or foot,
> Eternal, all-pervading, omnipresent, exceedingly subtle;
> That is the Imperishable, which the wise perceive as the source of beings. . . .[23]

> . . . Heavenly, formless is the person.

[16] *Ibid.*, 3.2.12.
[17] *Ibid.*, 3.2.14.
[18] *Ibid.*, 3.2.15, 18, 19, 25.
[19] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, III. 8.8.
[20] *Ibid.*, III. 9.26; also IV. 2.3; see also II.3 6, IV.4.22.
[21] *Kathopanishad*, III. 15.
[22] *Chandogyopanishad*, VIII. 1.4.
[23] *Mundakopanishad*, I. 1.6.

He is without and within, unborn,
Breathless, mindless, pure,
Higher than the high, Imperishable. . . ."[24]

. . . Verily, O friend! he who recognizes that shadowless, bodiless, bloodless, pure, Imperishable, arrives at the Imperishable Itself. He, knowing all, becomes the All. . . .[25]

. . . He who knows (the Brahman) as unborn, uncaused, unestablished (on anything else), devoid of sound, devoid of touch, devoid of form, devoid of taste, devoid of smell, imperishable, not dense, not prodigious, originless, as one's own self, (he) sorrows not. That which is lifeless, mouthless, earless, speechless, mindless, splendourless, devoid of name and clan, headless, devoid of hands and feet, devoid of attachment, devoid of glowing redness like fire, immeasurable, not short, not long, not gross, not minute (like a speck), not small, not great, not definable, not obscure, not demonstrable, not manifest, not shrouded, without an interior, without an exterior. It does not feed on anything nor does anything feed on it. One should attain this (Brahman). . . .[26]

. . .(The Atman) that is not attained, that is not born, that does not die, that does not dry up, that is not rendered damp, that is not burnt, that does not shake, that is not divided, that does not perspire, that is devoid of attributes, that remains as the passive witness, that is pure, that limbless Atman, the purely subtle one, that is devoid of conceit, that is devoid of attachment, the changeless entity, that is devoid of the perceptions of sound, touch, form, taste and smell, the unerring, that is devoid of desire, the all-pervading one, that is incomprehensible and indestructible. . . .[27]

. . .That is the transcendent *Akasha*, that confirmed existence and as such voidless, devoid of other existence and stretches beyond the void; that which is enthroned in the heart, which is neither contemplation, nor the one who contemplates, nor that which is contemplated upon, but is yet contemplated upon as alone remaining; that, other than which there is not any, but, should there be such other, it is the void and, hence, not anything beyond; which is not beyond what is beyond; which is inconceivable; which is unknowable; which is not the truth, nor what is beyond that, the wise ones know. What was grasped by the sages, the gods did not; nor did they (the gods) know what lies beyond. In it there is neither greed, nor delusion, nor fear, nor pride, nor desire, nor anger, nor sin, nor the opposites, cold and heat, nor hunger, nor thirst, nor determina-

[24] *Ibid.*, II. 1.2.
[25] *Subalopanishad*, III. 1.
[26] *Prashnopanishad*, IV. 10.
[27] *Atmopanishad*, 1-4.

tion, nor hesitation; neither the caste-pride of the Brahmana, nor the gathering together of the knot of bondage, nor of liberation; neither fear, nor pleasure, nor pain; so also, nor repute, nor disrepute. What is removed completely away from these states, is the Brahman and what lies beyond that, is the Brahman. . . .[28]

. . .Or else, O thou of austere vow, one should meditate upon the Truth, Ishana, the non-dual Wisdom and Bliss, the exquisitely pure, the eternal, that has neither the beginning, nor the middle, nor the end; the not-gross, the not-ethereal, the intangible, the imperceptible, that is neither taste, nor what is called smell, the immeasurable, the peerless, the Atman, that is Existence, Consciousness and Bliss, the endless, as 'The Brahman I am,' for the attachment of *Videhamukti* (disembodied Liberation). . . .[29]

. . .Thereafter (after the dawning of the right knowledge, that all but the Brahman is nought) there remains a certain *Sat* or existence, which is tranquil and sublime, which is neither radiance nor darkness outspread, which is indescribable and indistinct (which is "the absolute Brahman and certainly not non-existence," says the *Shruti*). . . .[30]

. . .The Transcendent Brahman, which is indeterminate and unattached, is imperishable. That has no description, nor aim; is non-conjecturable and peerless; has neither this side, nor the side beyond; is indivisible, incomprehensible and extremely flawless; is the prop of all beings; has no support; is non-ailing; has no sanction; is non-demonstrable, immeasurable and beyond the range of perception; is non-gross, non-atomic and non-diminutive; is lengthless, originless and wasteless; is soundless, intangible and formless; that has neither eyes, nor ears, nor name; is all-knowing, all-reaching, tranquil and standing in the hearts of all; is capable of being well comprehended, by following the import of the instructions of the Guru; and not capable of being comprehended even with difficulty, by those not endowed with a sound mind; is digitless, quality-less, tranquil, changeless, and independent (of everything else); is smearless; does not stand in need of protection; is immovable, unchangeable and perpetually the same; and is unaffected and constant. . . .[31]

The next step is to see *what* this undifferentiated, non-qualified unity is. Even a little reflection will show that regression soon leads to pure, undifferentiated consciousness, to One who is "without interior or exterior," as the *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad* puts it, "entire and pure intelligence alone. . . .[32] Summarizing the teachings of the Vedas, their parts, the Upanishads and the *Smritis*, the *Brahma-Sutras* affirm that all these "declare Brahman to

[28] *Tejo-Bindupanishad*, I. 6-14.
[29] *Darshanopanishad*, IX. 3-5.
[30] *Yogakundalyopanishad*, III. 24-25.
[31] *Yogashikhopanishad*, III. 11-21.
[32] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, 4.5.13.

be Consciousness alone."[33] Indeed, this Consciousness must be so pure that its knowledge even of Itself cannot be conscious knowledge—for that too would imply a duality, a knowledge in the sense of an awareness and an entity that is aware. As Ghalib would say *Asle—shahudo—shahido—mashud ek hain, Hairan hoon phir mushahida hai kis hisab mein.*

Once again, scores and scores of passages can be cited. A few representative ones will have to suffice.

> ...Then spake Maitreyi: 'Herein, indeed, you have bewildered me, sir—in saying: 'After death there is no consciousness'!
>
> Then spake Yajnavalkya: 'Lo, verily, I speak not bewilderment. Sufficient, lo, verily, is this for understanding.'
>
> For where there is a duality as it were, there one sees another; there one smells another; there one hears another; there one speaks to another; there one thinks of another; there one understands another. Where, verily, everything has become just one's own self, then whereby and whom would one smell? Then whereby and whom would one see? Then whereby and whom would one hear? Then whereby and to whom would one speak? Then whereby and on whom would one think? Then whereby and whom would one understand? Whereby would one understand Him by whom one understands this all? Lo, whereby would one understand the Understander?. . .[34]

> ...Verily, while he does not there see (with the eyes) he is verily seeing though he does not see (what is usually to be seen); for there is no cessation of the seeing of a seer, because of his imperishability (as a seer). It is not, however, a second thing, other than himself and separate, that he may see. . .[35]

> ...Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, understands nothing else—that is a Plenum. But where one sees something else—that is the small. Verily, the Plenum is the same as the immortal; but the small is the same as the mortal.[36]

> ... Or else, giving up even that element of consciousness, the *Jiva* stands tranquillized and, with his palpable sentience reduced to quiescence, shines like a gem in the Atman. That state of persons, with the mind obliterated, when the mind is devoid of cognitional powers, that comprehension, is what is known as sleeping-while-yet-waking (as during that state the

[33] *Brahma-Sutras*, 3.2.16,17.
[34] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, II. 4. 13, 14; also IV. 5.15.
[35] *Ibid.*, IV. 3. 23; similar passages (IV. 3. 24-31) that follow state that while He smells, tastes, speaks, hears, thinks, touches, knows, He does not smell, taste, speak to, hear, think of, touch or know *another*.
[36] *Chandogyopanishad*, VII. 24.

difference between the cognizer and the thing cognized does not flash on the mind).[37]

. . .The supreme sentience (though known by the names of the innermost and the transcendent) is one alone. That is also known as the supreme existence, spotless, equipoised, pure, devoid of the form of self-consciousness, manifest only once, (it being non-recurrent), flawless, ever ascendant, and well-balanced, and is being sung by the names of the Brahman and the *Paramatman.*[38]

. . .*When there is not oneness whence (can arise) duality? When there is* not mortality, whence (can arise) immortality? (It is) not (endowed) with internal knowledge; nor with external knowledge; nor with both these kinds of knowledge; not a mass of knowledge; not knowledge, nor not-knowledge; not (previously) known nor capable of being known. This is the doctrine relating to liberation. This is the doctrine of the Vedas.[39]

. . .I am the Brahman, which is unconditioned by the limitations of space, time and the like, whose either extremities (*viz.*, the truth of whose existence and the falsity of the existence of things apart from the Atman) have not been seen by many, which is the pure, the imperishable, the tranquillized and the one absolute sentience. I am nothing else.[40]

. . .'Sentience is the Brahman. . . . The energy of sentience is the Brahman. The friend and relation of sentience is the Brahman. . .' Sentience, when it rests everywhere and is thoroughly quiescent, (that alone) is realised as the Brahman. . . .[41]

In the middle of the heart (of the meditating *Yogin*) is all that, which has the eye of sentience; which is firmly fixed in the eye of sentience. The world has sentience as its eye; sentience alone is the ultimate support; verily sentience is the Brahman . . . .[42]

. . . This atom (of the innermost Atman) is absolute sentience alone, subtler than ether . . . . In the interior of this tiniest atom of sentience, (which is the *Paramatman*), the atoms of countless crores of macrocosms frequently come into existence and carry out the functions allotted to them to meet with dissolution with the lapse of their staying power. . . . This (Atman) which manifests itself all around for the reason that apart from it, there is void, is at the same time the *An-akasha*, on account of its being essentially of the nature of absolute sentience . . . . This (Atman) cannot be demonstrated as 'This,' 'That' and so on, and cannot be corre-

lated with anything else. Hence is it something that may be characterized as absolute existence. This (Atman) is sentient for the reason that it has manifestation (as such) and is yet non-sentient for the reason that there is nothing else (apart from it) to be sensed by it, and hence resembles a stone in point of non-responsivity. . . .[43]

. . . There exists here, as well as everywhere else, pure sentience alone, unaccompanied by ideations, absolutely self-manifest, having the generic property of omnipresence and invulnerable. . . .[44]

. . .I am the sentience (of the Brahman) alone. Those worlds are that sentience alone. The extreme limits of the cardinal points (coterminous with the horizon of my vision) are that sentience alone. These creatures (of the phenomenal world) are that sentience alone. The seer (the Brahman) that is the witness freed from the perception and what is perceived alike, that is absolutely flawless in form, that is ever in the ascendant and is devoid of reflection, is of the character of that sentience alone. The real form of sentience, when freed from responsivity, is of the character of perfect radiance. I am the vast, absolute perception, wherein all other perceptions stand abated. Assuming this attitude, with all thy ideations tranquillized, with all thy desires completely set at rest, having attained the changeless state, O chief among the sages! do thou become firmly established in the magnificence of thine own Atman.[45]

The indestructible ether of consciousness which (pervades and hence) characterizes all things, which is indivisible and which is devoid of imperfection, is, like the universe, a complete whole. . . .[46]

. . . Conceive that there is consciousness in every thing in this life, that this is consciousness alone, this is made of consciousness alone, thou art consciousness, I am consciousness, and that all these worlds are consciousness . . . .[47]

Be convinced that there is consciousness here, that (all) this is consciousness alone and is pervaded by consciousness, that thou art consciousness and I am consciousness, and all these worlds are consciousness.[48]

While scores of other passages can be cited, let us glance at a passage that is typical of many Upanishads in that it relies on the virtually interminable reiteration of a few basic propositions. I would hope, as I mentioned earlier, that even though the passage appears unnecessarily long and repetitious, the reader will not skip past it and will, instead, read it:

[43] *Mahopanishad*, II. 1-11.
[44] *Ibid.*, VI. 66-82.
[45] *Varahopanishad*, II. 45-8.
[46] *Ibid.*, IV. 116-121.
[47] *Anna-Purnopanishad*, I. 22.
[48] *Yajnavalkyopanishad*, 31.

One should conceive the Indivisible One Essence as utter consciousness, only utter consciousness, as utter consciousness of the Indivisible One Essence, as Essence. All utter consciousness, devoid of birth, is utter consciousness. All this near is utter consciousness. That yonder is, indeed, utter consciousness. Being the Atman, they know, as utter consciousness and Indivisible One Essence. All the world is utter consciousness. 'They-hood' and 'my-hood' are utter consciousness. Ether, the Earth, Water, Air, Fire, Brahman, Hari, Shiva, what is little and is not-little, all these are indeed only utter consciousness. Whatever is, is only utter consciousness, all that is the Indivisible One Essence. The past, the present and the future, all is verily utter consciousness. Matter and Time are utter consciousness. Knowledge and the object of knowledge are utter consciousness. The knower is of the form of utter consciousness. Everything is utter consciousness. Conversation is utter consciousness. Whatever is, is utter consciousness. What exists and what does not exist are utter consciousness. From the beginning and the end are utter consciousness. The preceptor and the pupil and such-like, are utter consciousness. The seeing and the object seen, if they are utter consciousness are always of consciousness. The all-wonderful is utter consciousness. The gross body is only utter consciousness. The subtle body, as well as the causal body, does not exist apart from utter consciousness. I and thou, are utter consciousness. The corporeal, the incorporeal and such-like are of consciousness. Religious merit and sin are utter consciousness. The *Jiva* is embodied consciousness. Apart from utter consciousness, there is no desire. Apart from utter consciousness, there is no knowing. Apart from utter consciousness, there is no *Mantra* and the like. Apart from utter consciousness, there is no deity. Apart from utter consciousness, there are no *Dikpalas*, as the guardians of the cardinal points. Apart from utter consciousness, there is no jurisprudence. Transcending utter consciousness is the Brahman. There is indeed nothing apart from utter consciousness. Apart from utter consciousness, there is no illusion. Apart from utter consciousness, there is no adoration. Apart from utter consciousness, there is nothing to be reflected upon. Apart from utter consciousness, there is no truth. Apart from utter consciousness, there is no treasure or such-like. Apart from utter consciousness, there is no wealth. Apart from utter consciousness, there is no quiescence. Apart from utter consciousness, there is no non-quiescence. Apart from utter consciousness, there is no detachment. All is only utter consciousness, whatever and to whatever extent it may be, is utter consciousness. Whatever is seen and to whatever extent, is utter consciousness. Whatever is situated at a distance and howsoever distant it may be, all is utter consciousness. Whatever and to whatever extent the elements and such-like, whatever and to whatever extent things cognized, whatever and to whatever extent the Vedantas (the ends of all knowledge), all is verily utter consciousness. From utter consciousness there is no liberation. Apart from utter consciousness, there is nothing cognizable. All is only utter

consciousness. Apart from utter consciousness there is no Brahman, the Indivisible One Essence. Thou art the Indivisible One Essence, according to the *Shastra*, in me, in thee, in the all-powerful.[49]

Thus it comes about that the Brahman is proclaimed to be non-differentiated, pure consciousness. One feature of this conception should be mentioned explicitly, even if it is obvious. In this conception Brahman is absolutely autonomous.

> . . . 'That Plenum, sir—on what is it established?' 'On its own greatness —unless, indeed, not on greatness at all. Here on earth people call cows and horses, elephants and gold, slaves and wives, fields and abodes "greatness". I do not speak thus; I do not speak thus,' said he; for (in that case) one thing is established upon another.[50]

And so the Upanishads refer to Him as "standing in Himself,"[51] as being "Self-luminous,"[52] as being "self-existent," as "abiding in His own greatness."[53]

MAN

In relation to man the Upanishads put forth three propositions: (*i*) man is not the empirical being we perceive conventionally, he is not the body, for instance, nor the senses, nor the mind; (*ii*) he is the Atman; (*iii*) this Atman, in turn, is none other than Brahman Himself.

Even though the propositions follow directly from the affirmations about Brahman which have been cited above, it will be useful to go through at least a few of the hundreds of passages in which these propositions about the essence of man are stated:

> The fixed idea, that I am the body, is known as the inner sense. The fixed idea, that I am the body, is said to be the great worldly illusion. The fixed idea, that I am the body, is said to be its bondage. The fixed idea, that I am the body, is said to be its misery. The knowledge, that I am the body, is alone known as hell. The fixed idea, that I am the body, is said to be the entire universe. The fixed idea, that I am the body, is what denotes the knot of the heart. The knowledge, that I am the body, is only what is known as Ignorance. The knowledge, that I am the body, is only what does not exist. The thought, that I am the body, that is what is termed as Illusion. The knowledge, that I am the body, that alone is called

[49] *Tejo-Bindupanishad*, II. 24-41.
[50] *Chandogyopanishad*, VII. 24.
[51] For instance, *Kathopanishad*, V. 12, 13.
[52] For instance, *Kathopanishad*, V. 15; *Brahma-Sutras*, 3. 2-25.
[53] For instance, *Ishopanishad*, 8, *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, the endings of II. 6, IV. 6, VI. 5.

duality. The fixed idea, that I am the body, that alone is the real *Jiva* (the individual soul). The knowledge, that I am the body, is what is known as the limited one. The fixed idea, that I am the body, is what is patently a great sin. The thought, that I am the body, is undoubtedly heinous greed . . . .[54]

> . . . *The conception of 'I' and 'Mine' in relation to the body, the organs* of perception and the like which are *An-atman,* (i.e., have no bearing on the Atman). This false attribution should (by all means) be eradicated by the knower, through fixity in the Brahman . . . .[55]

Again and yet again is the body reviled.

> 'Sir, in this ill-smelling, unsubstantial body, which is a conglomerate of bone, skin, muscle, marrow, flesh, semen, blood, mucus, tears, rheum, faeces, urine, wind, bile and phlegm, what is the good of enjoyment of desires? In this body, which is afflicted with desire, anger, covetousness, delusion, fear, despondency, envy, separation from the desirable, union with the undesirable, hunger, thirst, senility, death, disease, sorrow, and the like, what is the good of enjoyment of desires?'[56]

> . . .Leaving off, even at a distance, the body, full of impure matter and flesh and generated out of the excretions of thy mother and thy father, even as thou wouldst a *Chandala, thyself turned into the Brahman, do* thou become one. . . .[57]

> . . . This (body of ours) is pleased in a short while and feels depressed in a short while. There is nothing like the body so deplorable, despicable and devoid of redeeming features. This body is the great abode of that reputed house-holder, individuality. Let it tumble down or stand firm. Of what avail is it to me? O Sire! This corporeal residence of mine, with the rows of domestic animals of the organs of perception and action tethered (at its stable), with covetousness leaping at the quadrangle in front, with the various functionings of the mind moving about the premises as servants, is not at all worthy of my desire. This corporeal abode of mine, with its terrible door of the mouth left ajar, occupied by the monkey of the tongue, with its protruding teeth and pieces of bone in evidence, is not at all worthy of my desire. Pray do thou tell me, O Sage! wherein is the attractive feature of this body, which is made up of blood and flesh, the only course left open to which is decay, either in its exterior or interior? Whoever has given the verdict of stability in relation to lightning, autumnal clouds and the city of the *Gandharva*-s, (castles in the air), let him have firm faith in the body as well. . . .[58]

[54] *Tejo-Bindupanishad*, V. 89-97.
[55] *Adhyatmopanishad* 1-3.
[56] *Maitreyopanishad*, I. 3.
[57] *Adhyatmopanishad*, 4-11.
[58] *Mahopanishad*, III. 27-36.

... For him, who would not develop an aversion for this body of his, stinking with filth, what other inducement for detachment could be prescribed for his benefit? The body is extremely impure, while the Atman embodied therein is intensely flawless. Knowing the vast difference between the two, (the body and the Atman), who is to prescribe the standard of purity?...[59]

...(This body) pillared by bones, bound together by tendons, plastered with flesh and blood, covered by skin, foul-smelling, filled with urine and faeces, subject to old age and affliction, an abode of diseases, liable to injury, full of passion, impermanent .... If one were to take delight in the body which is a conglomerate of flesh, blood, pus, faeces, urine, tendons, marrow and bones, that fool will be (delighted) in hell as well ....[60]

...this body is born of sexual union alone, is devoid of consciousness and is verily hell as it has emerged through the urinal path ... it is fully filled with faeces, urine, wind, bile, phlegm, marrow, fat, fatty exudations and many other filthy things....[61]

This body is born and it has death; it has originated from the impure secretions of the mother and father; it is the abode of joy and sorrow and it is impure .... It is built up of primary fluids, subject to grievous maladies, abode of sinful actions, transitory and diffused with agitated feelings....

It always naturally exudes at the appropriate time impure secretions through the nine apertures. Having impure matter it smells foul ... Viewing this body as 'I' and 'mine' is smearing oneself with faeces and urine in the place of cosmetics....[62]

These and numerous similar passages state the position of the Upanishads *vis-a-vis* the empirical man of flesh and blood and desires. If a complement occurs ("the human body is said to be the temple of God ..."[63]) its purpose is merely to draw attention to what dwells *in* the body—the Atman ("the *jiva* inherent therein is alone the Shiva ..."[64]) and to stress that the body can be made into the preliminary means for transcending the body itself.

Now, if the body, the senses, etc., do not constitute the man, what does? Again and again the Upanishads point to another, the one by which all else is done.

... Then his father said to him: 'Shvetaketu, my dear, since now you are

[59] *Muktikopanishad*, II. 61-71.
[60] *Narada-Parivrajakopanishad*, 3. 45-8. See also *ibid.*, 4. 25-7.
[61] *Maitreyopanishad*, 1.3.
[62] *Skandopanishad*, 10.
[63] *Ibid.*, 2. 5-9.

conceited, think yourself learned, and are proud, did you also ask for that teaching whereby what has not been heard of becomes heard of, what has not been thought of becomes thought of, what has not been understood becomes understood?'[65]

By whom impelled soars forth the mind projected?
By whom enjoined goes forth the earliest breathing?
By whom impelled this speech do people utter?
The eye, the ear—what god, pray, them enjoineth?
That which is the hearing of the ear, the thought of the mind,
The voice of speech, as also the breathing of the breath,
And the sight of the eye! Past these escaping, the wise,
On departing from this world, become immortal . . . .
That which is unexpressed with speech
That with which speech is expressed—
That indeed know as Brahman,
Not this that people worship as this.
That which one thinks not with thought
That with which they say thought is thought—
That indeed know as Brahman,
Not this that people worship as this.
That which one sees not with sight,
That with which one sees sights—
That indeed know as Brahman,
Not this that people worship as this.
That which one hears not with hearing,
That with which hearing here is heard—
That indeed know as Brahman,
Not this that people worship as this.
That which one breathes not with breathing
That with which breathing is conducted—
That indeed know as Brahman,
Not this that people worship as this.[66]

Thus far we have covered the first two propositions relating to the essence of man, that the essence is *not* the empirical being of flesh and blood, that it is instead the Atman. We now come to the third proposition—that the Atman is none other than the Brahman Itself. Three of the four *Mahavakyas* of the Upanishads proclaim this identity: the first of these *Mahavakyas* is "*Prajnanam Brahman*" (the greatest knowledge is Brahman), the second, third and fourth are, "*Aham Brahmasmi*" (I am Brahman), "*Tat Tvam Asi*" (That thou art), and "*Ayam Atman Brahman*" (This Atman is the Brahman).[67]

[65]*Chandogyopanishad*, VI. 1-3. [66]*Kenopanishad*, I. 1, 2, 4-8.
[67]*Shuka-Rahasyopanishad*, 30-38; see also *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, 1.4.10, 4.4.5; *Chandogyopanishad*, 6.8.7 etc.

This identity of the Atman and the Brahman is affirmed hundreds of times:

> Whatever is here, that is there.
> What is there, that again is here.
> He obtains death after death
> Who seems to see a difference here.
> By the mind, indeed, is this (realization) to be attained—
> There is no difference here at all.
> He goes from death to death
> Who seems to see a difference here.[68]

> The one God, hidden in all things,
> All-prevading, the Inner Soul of all things . . .
> in all things abiding. . . .[69]

> . . . Having created it, into it,
> indeed, He entered. . . .[70]

> Delusion shows itself to be of five kinds. That alone is related here. The first kind of delusion is, that the *Jiva* and the *Ishvara* are different (from each other) in form . . . . The delusion relating to the difference (between the *Jiva* and the *Ishvara*) is removed by looking at an object and its reflected image (in a reflecting medium). . . .[71]

> . . . There are two *suparna*-s (kings of birds) abiding together in this body (of ours) and they are known as the *Jiva* and the *Isha*. Of the two, the *Jiva* enjoys the fruits of all actions, but not so the great *Ishvara*. The great *Ishvara* manifests itself purely in the form of a witness, not partaking in the enjoyment (of fruits). Any difference manifesting itself between the two is the work of *Maya* alone. The difference (between the *Jiva* and the *Ishvara*) is only apparent, (being outwardly attributed to two different entities), but in reality they do not differ in essence, for the reason that otherwise, sentience will be shorn of its sentient principle . . . .[72]

> He alone sees, who sees that the beginningless and the endless Brahman, the real, the non-dual, weighty Wisdom and Bliss in his own Atman . . . . When, by the strength of one's Wisdom, the ignorance which produces the difference (between the Atman, i.e., one's own self, and the Brahman) is lost altogether, O sage, what will the really non-existent difference between the Atman and the Brahman do?[73]

[68] *Kathopanishad*, IV. 10, 11.
[69] *Shvetashvataropanishad*, 6.11.
[70] *Taittiriyopanishad*, 2.6.
[71] *Anna-purnopanishad*, I. 13-16.
[72] *Ibid.*, IV. 26-36.
[73] *Darshanopanishad*, IV. 60-63.

Even as the *Akasha*, occupied by a pot, is not in reality carried from place to place, when the pot is carried, and the pot may disintegrate, while the *Akasha* thereof does not, so also is the *Jiva* resembling the *Akasha*. Like the pot it assumes various forms and is capable of varying again and again. On the destruction (of the pot) one will not know it as the destruction of the *Akasha* but would comprehend it as the ever expansive *Akasha*.[74]

. . . The Atman is both *inside* the body and *outside*. He is *down below* and is high above. He is in the cardinal extremities as well. Here is the Atman. There is the Atman alike. There is no (spot in the) phenomenal world unoccupied by the Atman. He does not exist where I am not. There is nothing which is not pervaded by the Atman. What else do I desire to have? Everything is (part of the infinite and immutable) existence and sentience that is vast. All this is verily the Brahman. Everything is this extensive Atman . . . .[75]

This earth is honey for all creatures, and all creatures are honey for this earth. This shining, immortal person who is in this earth, and, with reference to oneself, this shining, immortal person who is in the body—he, indeed, is just this Atman, this Immortal, this Brahman, this All.[76]

Verily, this Soul is the overlord of all things, the king of all things. As all the spokes are held together in the hub and felly of a wheel, just so in this Soul all things, all gods, all worlds, all breathing things, all these selves are held together.[77]

. . . This Brahman is without an earlier and without a later, without an inside and without an outside. This Atman is Brahman, the all-perceiving. . . .[78]

. . . Then Ushasta Chakrayana questioned him, 'Yajnavalkya', said he, 'explain to me him who is the Brahman present and not beyond our ken, him who is the Soul in all things.'

'He is your soul, which is in all things.'

'Which one, O Yajnavalkya, is in all things?'

'He who breathes in with your breathing in is the Soul of yours, which is in all things. He who breathes out with your breathing out is the Soul of yours, which is in all things. He who breathes about with your breathing about is the Soul of yours, which is in all things. He who

[74] *Amrita-Bindupanishad*, 13, 14. [75] *Mahopanishad*, VI. 9-15.
[76] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, II. 5. 1; the succeeding passages (II. 5. 2-14) affirm the same principle by referring in place of the earth to the waters, fire, wind, sun, the quarters of heaven, the moon, lightning, thunder, space, law, Truth, mankind, the Soul.
[77] *Ibid.*, II. 5.15. [78] *Ibid.*, 2.5.19.

breathes up with your breathing up is the Soul of yours, which is in all things. He is your soul, which is in all things.'

Ushasta Chakrayana said: 'This has been explained to me just as one might say, "This is a cow. This a horse." Explain to me him who is just the Brahman present and not beyond our ken, him who is the Soul in all things.'

'He is your soul, which is in all things.'

'Which one, O Yajnavalkya, is in all things?'

'You could not see the seer of seeing. You could not hear the hearer of hearing. You could not think the thinker of thinking. You could not understand the understander of understanding. He is your soul, which is in all things. Aught else than Him (or, than this) is wretched.'

Thereupon Ushasta Chakrayana held his peace.[79]

'Quite so, O Yajnavalkya. Declare the Inner Controller.'

He who, dwelling in the earth, yet is other than the earth, whom the earth does not know, whose body the earth is, who controls the earth from within—He is your Soul, the Inner Controller, the Immortal. . . .

'. . . He is the unseen Seer, the unheard Hearer, the unthought Thinker, the ununderstood Understander. Other than Him there is no seer. Other than Him there is no hearer. Other than Him there is no thinker. Other than Him there is no understander. He is your Soul, the Inner Controller, the Immortal.' Thereupon Uddalaka Aruni held his peace.[80]

Verily, this soul is Brahman, made of knowledge, of mind, of breath, of seeing, of hearing, of earth, of water, of wind, of space, of energy and of non-energy, of desire and of non-desire, of anger and of non-anger, of virtuousness and of non-virtuousness. It is made of everything. This is what is meant by the saying 'made of this, made of that.'[81]

Now the light which shines higher than this heaven, on the backs of all, on the backs of everything, in the highest worlds, than which there are no higher—verily, that is the same as this light which is here within a person. . . .[82]

'. . . That which is the finest essence, this whole world has that as its soul. That is Reality. That is Atman. That art thou, Shvetaketu'.[83]

[79] *I.U.*, III. 4. 1-2.

[80] *I.U.*, III. 7. 3-23; the intervening passages affirm the same principle for Him who dwells in water, fire, atmosphere, wind, sky, sun, quarters of heaven, moon, space, darkness, light, things, breath, speech, eyes, ears, mind, skin, understanding and semen and is yet other than each of these.

[81] *Ibid.*, IV. 4.5.

[82] *Chandogyopanishad*, 3.13.7.

[83] *Chandogyopanishad*, VI. 8.6; similarly, VI. 9.4, 10.3, 11.3, 13.3, 14.3 and 15.3.

> Those who consider that He (Brahman) as one and himself (the individual self) as another are beasts, though not beasts in their (true) nature. . . .[84]

> The being inside is God, His qualities having been declared.[85]

As is well-known the *Gita* too proclaims the identity of Brahman and the Atman on numerous occasions; it too affirms that Brahman Himself is the one who is lodged in the heart: "The light even of lights, that is said to be beyond darkness, knowledge, the knowable, the Goal of Knowledge, (It) is implanted in the heart of everyone. . . . Having no beginning, having no qualities, this Supreme Self, imperishable though dwelling in the body. . . ."[86]

The Upanishadic stand about the identity of the Atman and Brahman also becomes obvious when we consider that they describe the Atman in terms that are identical with the terms they use to describe Brahman.

> This, verily, is That. This, indeed, was That, even the Real. He who knows that wonderful being as the first-born—namely, that Brahman is the Real—conquers these worlds. Would he be conquered who knows thus that great spirit as the first-born—namely, that Brahman is the Real? (No!) for indeed, Brahma is the Real.[87]

> Now, this person who is seen within the eye is the hymn, is the chant, is the recitation, is the sacrificial formula, is the prayer. The form of this one is the same as the form of that (person seen in the sun). The songs of the former are the songs of this. The name of the one is the name of the other.[88]

> Verily, what is called Brahman—that is the same as what the space outside of a person is. Verily, what the space outside of a person is—that is the same as what the space within a person is. Verily, what the space within a person is—that is the same as what the space here within the heart is. That is the Full, the Non-active.[89]

> He who consists of mind, whose body is life, whose form is light, whose conception is truth, whose Atman is space, containing all works, containing all desires, containing all odours, containing all tastes, encompassing this whole world, the unspeaking, the unconcerned—this Soul of mine within the heart is smaller than a grain of rice, or a barley-corn, or a mustard-seed, or a grain of millet, or the kernel of a grain of millet; this soul of mine within the heart is greater than the earth,

[84] *Narada-Parivrajakopanishad*, 9.1.
[85] *Brahma-Sutras*, 1.1.20.
[86] *Bhagvad Gita*, 13.17, 31.
[87] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, V. 4.
[88] *Chandogyopanishad*, I. 7.5.
[89] *Ibid.*, III. 12.7.

greater than the atmosphere, greater than the sky, greater than these worlds. Containing all works, containing all desires, containing all odours, containing all tastes, encompassing this whole world, the unspeaking, the unconcerned—this is the Soul of mine within the heart, this is Brahman. Into Him I shall enter on departing hence.[90]

'That person who is seen in the eye—He is the Self (Atman),' said he. 'That is the immortal, the fearless. That is Brahman. . . .'[91]

Om! (The teacher should say:) 'Now, what is here in this city of Brahman, is an abode, a small lotus-flower. Within that is a small space. What is within that, should be searched out; that, assuredly, is what one should desire to understand.'

If they (i.e., the pupils) should say to him: 'This abode, the small lotus-flower is here in this city of Brahman, and the small space within that—what is there which should be searched out, which assuredly one should desire to understand?', he should say: 'As far, verily, as this world-space extends, so far extends the space within the heart. Within it, indeed, are contained both heaven and earth, both fire and wind, both sun and moon, lightning and the stars, both what one possesses here and what one does not possess; everything here is contained within it.'

If they should say to him: 'If within this city of Brahman is contained everything here, all beings as well as all desires, when old age overtakes it or it perishes, what is left over therefrom?', he should say: 'That does not grow old with one's old age; it is not slain with one's murder. That is the real city of Brahman. In it desires are contained. That is the Soul free from evil, ageless, deathless, sorrowless, hungerless, thirstless, whose desire is the Real, whose conception is the Real.[92]

Both he who is here in a person and he who is yonder in the sun—he is one.[93]

He who is yonder, yonder person—I myself am he.[94]

His is that shining form which gives heat in yonder sun and which is the brilliant light in a smokeless fire, as also the fire in the stomach which cooks food. For thus has it been said: 'He who is in the fire, and he who is here in the heart, and he who is yonder in the sun—he is one.'[95]

Now, He who dwells within the lotus of the heart and eats food is the same as that solar fire which dwells in the sky, called Time, the invisible, which eats all things as his food.[96]

[90] *Ibid.* III. 14. 2-4.
[91] *Ibid.*, IV. 15.1.
[92] *Ibid.*, VIII. 1. 1-5; similarly, see V. 12-17, VII. 25 etc.
[93] *Taittiriyopanishad*, II. 8, III. 10 4.
[94] *Ishopanishad*, 16.
[95] *Maitreyopanishad*, VI. 17; similarly, VI. 35.
[96] *Ibid.*, VI. 2.

I ask it of you: 'Where is that Person?' '
To whom he then said: 'Even here within the body, O friend, is that Person in whom they say the sixteen parts arise. . . .'[97]

. . .By this truth, by this austerity, I am a season, I am connected with the seasons. Who am I? 'I am you. . . . I am a season. I am connected with the seasons. From space as a womb I am produced as the semen for a wife, as the brilliance of the year, as the soul (Atman) of every single being. You are the soul of every single being. What you are, this am I.'[98]

Two additional, typically wordy and repetitive passages will conclude our illustrations of the way in which descriptions of the Atman follow those of Brahman.

The unswerving am I: the unthinkable am I; the non-conjecturable am I; the originless am I; the invulnerable am I; the non-embodied am I; the limbless am I; the fearless am I; the soundless am I; the formless am I; the intangible am I; the secondless am I; the tasteless am I; the flavourless am I; the beginningless and the immortal am I; the imperishable am I; the sexless am I; the dotageless am I; the partless am I; the lifeless am I; the non-mute am I; the incomprehensible am I; the unartificial am I; the inherent in the inmost am I; the ungraspable am I; the non-demonstrable am I; the non-descript am I; the speechless am I; the clanless am I; the bodiless am I; the eyeless am I; the invisible am I; the casteless am I; the indivisible am I; the marvellous am I; the immortal am I; the airless am I; the Etherless am I; the radianceless am I; the non-transgressor am I; the tenetless am I; the unborn am I; the subtle am I; the changeless am I; the motionless am I; the inertia-less am I; the rhythmless am I; the unqualified am I; the illusionless of the character of experience am I; the propless am I; the non-functioning am I; the non-dual am I; the *Purna* or full with *Akara* or *Vishnu* am I; the non-affected am I; the immediate am I; the earless am I; the lengthless am I; the indistinct am I; the non-ailing am I; the palpable non-dual Bliss and Wisdom am I; the unalterable am I; the desireless am I; the impurity-less, the non-doer am I; peerless am I; I am devoid of the consequences of ignorance; I am beyond the range of speech and the mind; I am not mean; I have no sorrow; doubt have I not; nor have I (the flame of) anger; I have neither beginning nor the middle nor the end; I am like Ether; I am of the form of the *Atma-chaitanya* (Self-consciousness); I am the palpable Bliss and Consciousness; I am of the form of the nectar of Bliss; I take my stand in the Atman; I am the interval; I long for the Atman; I am the transcendent Atman from the Ether; I am the *Ishvara*; I am *Ishana*; I am the adorable; I am the highest *Purusha*; I am the exalted; I am the all-witness; I am the farsighted; I am the controller of all action; I am the lord of the senses; I have the *Brahmarandhra*

[97] *Prashnopanishad*, VI. 1, 2.

[98] *Kaushitakeyopanishad*, 1.2 and 1. 6.

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[97] *Prashnopanishad*, VI. 1, 2.

[98] *Kaushitakyopanishad*, 1.2 and 1.6.

Of my own accord I am firmly planted in the Atman. Of my own accord I am the transcendent final resort. Of my own accord I feed on myself. Of my own accord I revel in myself. Of my own accord I am self-luminous. Of my own accord I am *Manas* (radiance) myself. I shall revel in my Atman myself. I shall look upon only myself. I have a comfortable seat in my own Self. I have my own Self as the residuum. I shall take my stand, of my own accord, on my own Consciousness. I shall revel in the delightful kingdom of my own Self. Taking my seat on the throne of my self, I shall conceive of nothing but my own Self. I am the Brahman alone, of the form of Consciousness alone. I am the non-dual Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. I am palpable Bliss alone. I am the absolute Brahman. I am always void of all. I am the blissful all-Atman. I am of the form of eternal Bliss. I am always the Ether of the Atman. I alone am of the form of the Sun of Consciousness, in the Ethereal sky of the heart. I am satisfied in the Atman, by the Atman. I have no form and am imperishable. I am liberated from being counted as "one". I am of the form of one eternally liberated. I am subtler than Ether. I have neither beginning nor end. I am of the form of all brightness. I am possessed of delights far and near. I am of the form of absolute existence. I am of the form of pure Liberation. I am of the form of true Bliss. I am palpable Knowledge and Bliss. I am of the form of absolute Wisdom. I am possessed of the qualities of Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. All this is utter Brahman. There is no other thing apart from the Brahman. I am that ever-blissful That alone. I am the eternal Brahman alone. What is known as "thou" and what is known as "that", there is nothing else apart from me. I am of the form of the mind and consciousness. I am the transcendent Shiva. I am of the form of extreme emotion. I am the delightful Atman. There is never any scope for my being a witness in the absence of all subtle objects to testify to. Owing to my being absolutely utter Brahman, I am the eternal Atman. I and I alone am the *Adisesha* (the prime residuum). I and I alone am the *Sesha* (the final residuum). I am released from name and form. I am Bliss incarnate. I am of the form of one devoid of the senses. I am of form of all emotions. I am devoid of bondage and liberation. I am perpetual Bliss incarnate. I am of the form of the prime consciousness. I am the Indivisible One Essence. I am beyond the range of speech and mind. I am everywhere the enjoyer of pleasure. I am everywhere of the form of fulness. I am possessed of the totality of Bliss. I am everywhere of the form of satiety. I am the essence of exquisite nectar. That which exists is only one, without a second. I am the Brahman alone. There is no doubt about it. I am of the form of the all-void; accessible through all scriptural precepts. I am the liberated. I am of the form of *Moksha* (Release). I am of the form of pleasure of disembodiment. I am of the form of absolute true Wisdom. I am the Blissful Absolute Existence. I am of the form of what transcends the *Turya* state. I am non-determinate in form. I am always of the form of the origin-less one. I have neither passion, nor impurity. I am pure. I am wise. I a

eternal. I am powerful. I am of the form of the import of the *Pranava*. I am devoid of taint.'[100]

This essential unity of the Atman and Brahman is the object of meditation; this is the unity that one must internalize, in the sense that one must not just know it as an intellectual proposition, it must suffuse one's being. This realization is the knowledge that must be one's sole aim, it is the knowledge which liberates. Whenever the Upanishads describe states of gnosis they affirm that they are suffused by this knowledge of the exclusive existence of Brahman alone, of the identity of one's Atman and the Brahman.

Thus, for instance, this is how the *Darshanopanishad* describes *Samadhi*:

> . . . *Samadhi* is the birth of consciousness relating to the oneness of the *Jivatman* and the *Paramatman*. The Atman is verily the eternal, the all-embracing, the perpetually identical, supreme Brahman, devoid of flaws. The one Being is divided out of delusion, on account of Illusion, and not in its real form. Hence there is only non-dualism; there is no phenomenal world; there is no cycle of births and deaths. Even as infinite Ether is said to be the Ether of the pot, the Ether of the *Matha* (the ascetic's resting place), even so the Atman is said to be of the form of the *Jiva* and the *Ishvara* by deluded people. 'I am not the body, nor the vital air, nor the senses, nor the mind; being always of the form of the witness, I am only Shiva alone,'—such knowledge it is, O foremost of sages, that is known as *Samadhi* in this world.[101]

The following is one of many similar accounts describing the *Jivanmukta:*

> (Wherein one assumes the attitude), 'All this is the Atman; (of this), what shall I seek and what abandon?' know that to be the state of non-attachment, established in the frame of the *Jivanmukta*. (The attitude,) 'I do not exist, nor aught else, nor this, nor (aught) other than this. I am always the Brahman alone,'—that is said to be non-attachment. . . .[102]

And this is how the *Mahopanishad* describes the final goal of the seven stages of knowledge:

> The process of restraining the functioning of the mind is known as Yoga. That should be considered as having seven stages. Those stages have already been related. The final goal of the seven stages is the state known as the Brahman, where there is no 'Thouhood,' nor 'I-hood,' nor 'Atman-hood,' nor 'Other-hood,' whatsoever, nor the perception of existence, wheresoever, nor the perception of anything within the range of existence

[100] *Tejo-Bindupanishad*, III. 1-43.
[101] *Darshanopanishad*, X. 1-5.
[102] *Annapurnopanishad*, II. 3-6.

as my abode; I am the saviour; I am the eye of eyes; I am Consciousness
and Bliss; I am the Supreme Will; I am palpable Consciousness; I am full
of Consciousness; I am full of radiance; I am ancient; I am the luminary
of luminaries; I am the witness of inertia; I am the *Turya-turiya*; I am
beyond darkness; I am divine; I am the God; I am incapable of being seen;
I am the revealed Veda; I am the Pole-star; I am eternal; I am the fault-
less; I am inactive; I am without impurity; I am flawless; I am concep-
tionless; I am undescribable; I am immobile; I am the changeless; I am
the ever-hallowed; I am devoid of qualities; I am devoid of desire; I am
devoid of sense-organs; I am the controller; I am devoid of wants; I am
devoid of parts; I am the Purusha, the *Paramatman*; I am the ancient, the
Supreme Being; I am the transcendent and the non-transcendent; I am
the enlightened; I am the tranquillizer of the phenomenal world; I am the
excellent nectar; I am the complete overlord; I am the time-honoured; I
am the full Bliss and the one-awakening; I am the innermost one essence;
I am the well-known; I am the quiet tranquillized; I am the resplendent
great Lord; I am that which should be thought of as but one without a
second and as differentiating the dual and the non-dual; the awakened I
am; the protector of all beings I am; the lord in the form of radiance am
I; I the great god, Mahadeva; I am the great knowable, the Maheshvara;
I am the liberated; the all-powerful am I; the adorable and the all-perva-
ding am I; fire am I, the Vasudeva, with eyes glancing from the entire
Universe; the greater than the Universe am I; the pure I am; the white,
the tranquillizer am I; the eternal am I; I am the Shiva; I dwell in the in-
most hearts of all beings as the Atman; the ever-existing am I; I am what
shines always and always; I take my stand in my own greatness; I am the
self-luminous in the interior of all and the lord of all; I am the presiding
resident over all beings; I am the all-pervading *Svaraj* (king holding sway
over the Atman); I am the all-witness, the Atman of all; the dweller in
the *Guha* or the heart caves of all beings; I am the manifestation of all
the senses and their *gunas* (qualities), and yet devoid of all the senses; I
have my seat beyond the three states (waking, dreaming, and sleeping); I
bestow my favour on all, I am the Atman, full of *Sat* or Existence, *Chit*
or Consciousness and *Ananda* or Bliss; I am the receptacle of the *Prema*
or Love of all; I am Existence, Consciousness, and Bliss alone; I am the
palpable Consciousness that is self-luminous; I am of the form of *sattva*,
inhering in all, as the Atman with accomplished existence alone; I am
existence alone, which is the basis of all; I am the breaker of the bonds
of all; I am the swallower of everything; I am the all-seeing; I am the
enjoyer of everything. He who knows the truth or reality thus is indeed
said to be the *Purusha*—thus the Upanishad [99]

Kumara asked his father thus: 'Pray relate to me about the realization
of the Atman.' He, the venerable *Parameshvara*, replied unto him as

[99] *Brahmanubhavopanishad*, II-III.

follows: 'I am of the form of the transcendent Brahman. I am exquisite Bliss. I am of the form of absolute knowledge. I am the absolute transcendent being. I am of the form of the absolute tranquillized being. I am of the form of absolute Consciousness. I am of the form of the absolute eternal being. I am the absolute ever-lasting being. I am of the form of absolute goodness. Having renounced the "I", I am the "I". I am of the form of what is devoid of all. I am of the Ether of consciousness. I am of the form of the absolute *Turya*. I am what is absolutely beyond the *Turya*. I am always of the form of Consciousness. I am made of Consciousness and Bliss. I am of the form of external aspect. I am always pure in form. I am of the form of absolute knowledge. I am absolute love. I am of the form of changelessness. I am devoid of desire and without distemper. I am always of the form of detachment. I am unalterable and imperishable. I am always of the form of the One Essence. I am always the embodiment of utter consciousness. I am of the form of unlimitedness. I am of the form of boundless Bliss. I am of the form of existence and transcendent Bliss. I am of the form of Consciousness and transcendent Bliss. I am of the form of what lies in the core of the core. I am beyond the reach of speech and mind. I am of the form of the Bliss of the Atman and am always true Bliss. I am of the form of the Atman, that revels in himself. I am the Atman, that is *Sadashiva* (ever-auspicious). I am of the form of the luminosity of the Atman. I am the essence of the radiance of the Atman. I have neither the beginning, nor the middle nor the end. I resemble the Ether. I am that imperishable, ever pure, absolutely conscious and blissful existence. I am the ever wakeful pure, one Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. I am of the form of the residuum, that ever remains. I am always what transcends all. I am of the form that transcends all forms and the embodiment of transcendent Ether. I am of the form of the totality of Bliss. I am always devoid of speech. I am of the form of the prop of all. I am always palpable consciousness. I am devoid of body and feeling. I am always devoid of anxiety. I am devoid of mental functions. I am the one essence of the Atman of absolute Consciousness. I am devoid of all objects of perception. I alone am of the form of Introspection. I am always full in form. I am ever thoroughly satisfied. Everything is "I am the Brahman only." I am only Consciousness. Only I, only I, am the all-pervading form. Only I am the great Atman. Only I am what is beyond the transcendent. I alone appear like everything else. I alone am the embodied one. I alone resemble the pupil (seeker). I am the support of the three worlds. I transcend the three durations. I am served by the Vedas. I have been demonstrated by the *Shastra*. I am firmly planted in the *Chitta* (mind). Nothing, nor the Earth has been relinquished by me. Be sure that whatsoever is beyond me is nothing. I am the Brahman. I am the accomplished one. I am always absolutely pure. I am rid of qualities. I am the absolute Atman. I am always devoid of outward aspect. I am absolutely the utter Brahman. I have neither dotage nor death. I manifest

or non-existence, what is immanent in all, tranquillized and propless, which stands in the ether of the heart, in the form of the innermost Atman, which is eternal, non-ailing, auspicious, devoid of illusion and nameless, which has no cause, which is neither existence (not being grasped by the senses), nor non-existence, nor intermediate between the two states, which is not all and is yet all, which is beyond the range of the mind and speech, which is fuller than the full, and more blissful than bliss, that is the state of the Brahman, the final goal of all these stages.[103]

and this is how Shuka describes his self-realization:

(Prior to my initiation by *Parama-shiva*), I remained steeped in the sleep of ignorance, deprived of the power of discrimination, with my mind ever leaning towards the *An-atman* of phenomenal existence and screened from the Atman altogether, disturbed by dreams wherein false pride, begotten of the 'I' and the 'Mine' conceptions, had the fullest play. Now that the sun of the real form of the Brahman, non-differentiated from the innermost Atman, has dawned upon my mind in its full splendour, due to the clear exposition by my Guru, (the great God, *Maha-deva*), of the real import of the terms of the *Maha-vakya-s*, I have been roused to a sense of reality.[104]

The final stage, of course, is that one must transcend even this conviction, one must pass the stage of even perpetually living the unity, one must simply dissolve—like the Brahman, a Consciousness whose knowledge even of itself cannot be conscious knowledge.

This, then, is the *Tejo-Bindupanishad's* description of the state of the *Videhamukta:*

One who has become the Brahman; who has tranquillized his own Atman; who is full of the Bliss of the Brahman; who is happy; who is crystal-like in form; who is profoundly silent; he alone is the *Videhamukta*. 'I am one whose Atman is all; who, alike everywhere, is the Atman; whose Atman is pure; whose "I" has been fully roused; who is excepted by the one Brahman; whose Atman is the one Atman; one who sees all in his own Atman; who is only his own Atman; I am the Atman that has no origin; whose Atman is immortal, who am myself the Atman, who knows no decay; whose Atman is seen through introspection; whose Atman is lovely; I am possessed of the characteristics of the silent Atman; the Atman of Bliss; the loving Atman; the Atman of liberation; devoid of bondage; I am the Brahman alone; I am Consciousness alone; 'whatever of this is not conceived'; he who stands thus in utter Consciousness alone is the *Videhamukta*. Having abandoned the conviction, *viz.*, that I am the

[104]*Shuka-Raha*[illegible]

the Brahman; who is fond of the essence of the nectar of the Brahman; who is of himself the essence of the nectar of the Brahman; who is immersed in the essence of the nectar of the Brahman; whose *Shivarcana* is the Bliss of the Brahman; who is satiated in the essence of the nectar of the Brahman; who experiences the Bliss of the Brahman; whose Bliss in Shiva is the Bliss of the Brahman; who shines as the essence of the Bliss of the Brahman; whose radiance is superb, as of the Bliss of the Brahman; who enjoys the Bliss of the Brahman uninterruptedly; who subsists on the food of the essence of the Bliss of the Brahman; who is a member of the family of the Bliss of the Brahman; who is perched on the essence of the Bliss of the Brahman; who is palpably the one Consciousness of the Bliss of the Brahman; who is the flood of the essence of the Bliss of the Brahman; who is nourished with the Bliss of the Brahman, who is associated with people enjoying the Bliss of the Brahman; who is firmly planted in the Atman of the Bliss of the Brahman. He who realizes, 'all this is of the form of the Atman; there is nothing else whatever, save the Atman; all is the Atman; I am the Atman, the transcendent Atman, possessed of the transcendent Atman, the Atman that is ever in the form of Bliss,'—he alone is the *Videhamukta*.

One who is full in form, the great Atman, the satiated Atman, the perpetual Atman; the Atman of the form of what penetrates the interior of all; the spotless Atman; the Atman-less one; the Atman which has a changeless form; the pure Atman; the tranquil of form; the Atman of the form of the tranquillized and the non-tranquillized; devoid of the state of manifold Atman-hood; who is rid of the totality of cares brought on by the differentiation of the *Jivatman* and the *Paramatman*; the Atman of the form of the liberated and the non-liberated; who is devoid of the state of being liberated and non-liberated; who is the Atman of the form of bondage and liberation; who is devoid of bondage and liberation; who is of the form of dualism and non-dualism; who is devoid of dualism and non-dualism; who is of the form of the all and the not-all; who is devoid of the all and the not-all; who is of the form of joy and exquisite joy; who is devoid utterly of joy and such-like; who is devoid of all volition; he is alone the *Videhamukta*.

He is the partless Atman; the flawless Atman; the Atman of Wisdom; the Atman of the Supreme *Purusha*; the Atman devoid of Bliss and such like; the Atman that is immortal; is of the immortal Atman; the Atman of the form of the triad of durations; who is devoid of the triad of durations; the Atman of vast expanse; the Atman immeasurable; the Atman of measure; who is devoid of measure; the Atman who is ever manifest; who is determined by his perpetual manifestation; the Atman that is characterized by the abandonment of every other thing; that is self-luminous, bereft of every other thing; the Atman that could be known by learning, ignorance and such-like; that is devoid of learning, ignorance and such-like; the Atman that is devoid of perpetuity and transience; that is devoid of 'here' and 'in that place'; the Atman devoid of the six qualities of tranquillity

and such-like; that is devoid of seeking after liberation and such-like; the Atman that is devoid of the gross body; that is devoid of the subtle body; the Atman that is devoid of the causal body and such-like; that is devoid of the *Turiya* and such like bodies; the Atman that is devoid of the sheath of *Anna* (food); that is devoid of the sheath of *Prana* (vital air); the Atman that is devoid of the *Manas* (the mental sheath); that is devoid of the *Vijnana* (Wisdom Sheath); the Atman that is devoid of the *Ananda* (Bliss Sheath); that is devoid of the five sheaths; the Atman of indeterminate form; that is devoid of distinctive form; the Atman not affected by the object seen; that is in no way affected by the sound heard; the Atman that is always devoid of concentration; that is devoid of beginning, middle and end; the Atman that is devoid of the *Prajnanavakya* (Wisdom is the Brahman); that is devoid of the realization 'I am the Brahman'; the Atman that has no such realization as 'Thou art That'; that cannot conceive 'This Atman is the Brahman'; the Atman that is devoid of what is to be expressed by 'Om'; that is devoid of what is to be expressed by the word 'All'; the Atman that is devoid of the triad of conditions (waking, dreaming and sleeping); the Atman that never decays; the Atman of consciousness; the Atman that is devoid of what ought to be known by the Atman; that has for its Atman 'the little whatever of this'; the Atman that is devoid of light and non-light; he alone is the *Videhamukta*.[105]

One can go on and on reproducing the hundreds and hundreds of affirmations of the identity of Brahman and the Atman that the Upanishads contain.

Instead of doing so, let us bring the affirmations down to earth by seeing what this identity of my Atman and the Brahman implies for what I now perceive in other beings:

> One sees everything as the Soul.[106]

> By seeing the self in all beings and all beings in the self, one goes to Brahman, not by any other course.[107]

> Discerning (It) in every single being, the wise, on departing from this world, become immortal.[108]

[105] *Tejo-Bindupanishad*, IV. 33-79.

[106] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, IV. 4. 23. [107] *Kaivalyopanishad*, 10.

[108] *Kenopanishad*, II. 13. The Gita echoes these propositions: thus in VI. 29, 30 we are told that "the man equipped with *Yoga* looks on all with an impartial eye, seeing Atman in all beings and all beings in Atman. He who sees Me everywhere and everything in Me, never vanishes from Me nor I from him." In XIII. 27 again: "Who sees abiding in all beings the same *Parameshwara*, imperishable in the perishable, he sees indeed." And yet again in XVIII. 20: "Know that knowledge whereby one sees in all beings the immutable entity—a unity in diversity—to be *Sattvika*." And so on.

Thus the knower sees in all the Absolute and all—including his own Self—as the Absolute; he looks upon all beings as being in the Self, he sees the Self alone in all beings.

The importance of going through the long and numerous citations in this section consists precisely in arriving at this set of conclusions. For, we can now see, while the Upanishads "exalt" the individual being by identifying him with the Brahman, it is a disembodied, indescribable being that they exalt; the empirical being of flesh and blood, of joys and sorrows is decried and reviled. Similarly, while they proclaim the identity of all beings with the Brahman and, hence, with each other, it is the identity of an abstraction that is affirmed, not the identity of beings as we perceive them in our daily lives. It is for this reason, as we shall see in Chapter 7, that these propositions fail to constitute an argument for compassion.

The *Isha's* compact account is, indeed, apposite:

> Now, he who on all beings
> Looks as just in the Self,
> And on the Self as in all beings—
> He does not shrink away from Him.
> In whom all beings
> Have become just the self of the discerner—
> Then what delusion, what sorrow is there
> Of him who perceives the unity?[109]

THE WORLD

The status of the empirical world follows directly from what has been said above about Brahman.

As all is Brahman, as Brahman, in turn, is an undifferentiated entity and as this entity is non-corporeal, a pure Consciousness, the empirical world that we perceive through our senses, this world of wood and stone with its apparent diversity, must be non-existent, a mere delusion.

In addition to what has been mentioned above, three sets of assertions contribute to this result: (*i*) statements to the effect that reality is one, (*ii*) statements affirming that apart from Brahman nothing exists and thus, (*iii*) statements affirming that the empirical world is an illusion, a delusion of the mind.

Each of these is important. Each yields crucial inferences. Hence, we should once again wade through representative passages from the Upanishads themselves. Let us begin with the first proposition, that *reality is one*.

Reductionism has already given us the notion of a non-corporeal Brahman as the first cause. We are now told that the effect is no different from its cause, from the substratum from which it has been formed, on which it rests. Thus, a pot is but a "verbal modification" of the clay from which

[109] *Ishopanishad*, 6,7.

t was made, the bangles are but a "verbal modification" of the gold from which they were made.

By the mind alone is It to be perceived.
There is on earth no diversity
He gets death after death,
Who perceives here seeming diversity.[110]

Whatever is here, that is there.
What is there, that again is here.
He obtains death after death
Who seems to see a difference here.
By the mind, indeed, is this (realization) to be attained—
There is no difference here at all!
He goes from death to death
Who seems to see a difference here.[111]

'How, pray, sir, is that teaching?'

'Just as, my dear, by one piece of clay everything made of clay may be known—the modification is merely a verbal distinction, a name; the reality is just "clay." Just as, my dear, by one copper ornament everything made of copper may be known—the modification is merely a verbal distinction, a name; the reality is just "copper." Just as, my dear, by one nail-scissors everything made of iron may be known—the modification is merely a verbal distinction, a name; the reality is just "iron"—so, my dear, is that teaching.[112]

. . .Even as the meaning of the word 'bracelet' cannot be separately understood apart from the gold (of which it is made) and the notion of 'gold' cannot be separated from the notion of the 'bracelet', even so, the significance of the word 'phenomenal world' is (by implication, not apart from the Brahman), the transcendent existence. . . .[113]

As always, these similies are very troublesome. Even when we concede that the clay is the only material out of which the pot is made, it is difficult from this to jump to the proposition that there is no significant sense in which the pot can be said to be different from the clay. After all, one is able to hold water and the other is not able to do so. Similarly, it is very difficult to concede that while the clay "in its unity" is "real," the products made from it "in their diversity" are "not real." The materiality of each being more or less the same, how is the reality quotient of one greater than that of another?

Unfortunately, while the Upanishads use similies upon similies, metaphors

[110] *Brihad-aranyakopanishad*, IV. 4. 19.
[111] *Kathopanishad*, 4. 10-11.
[112] *Chandogya-panishad*, VI. 1. 4-6.
[113] *Mahopanishad*, IV. 44-46.

upon metaphors, they do not stop to see that these do violence to their argument.

We must accustom ourselves to thinking around and beyond these similies and metaphors. The similies and metaphors—with the awkward questions they raise—do not constitute the basic position. The latter is independent of them and their only purpose is to help us take the first intellectual step towards the basic position of the Upanishads. The stark *Brahma-Sutras* summarize the relevant texts and the basic position. "The (Vedic) assertion (that 'all things become known when the One is known')," they note, "can remain unaffected only if all the effects are non-different from Brahman. . . .[114] The non-difference of cause and effect, apart from having often been directly affirmed in the Upanishads, follows also from the texts about origin, from the fact that "the effect is perceived when the cause is there," from the effect having an inherent existence in the cause, an existence that precedes its becoming manifest as the effect.[115] Now, as the Upanishads have earlier stated that in the beginning Brahman alone existed and that He is "impartite consciousness," it follows that whatever has followed is also just the same "impartite consciousness."

The second and third propositions, namely, that *Brahman alone exists, nothing apart from Him exists;* and, *therefore the empirical world is an illusion,* are best considered together:

> . . . The worlds have deserted him who knows the worlds in aught else than the Soul. . . . Everything has deserted him who knows everything in aught else than the Soul . . . . This Brahminhood, this Kshtrahood, these worlds, these gods, these beings, everything here is what this Soul is.[116]

> The Soul is below . . . .above . . . to the west . . . east . . . south . . . north. The Soul, indeed, is the whole world. . . .[117]

> Brahman, indeed, is the immortal, Brahman before,
> Brahman behind, to the right and to the left.
> Stretched forth below and above,
> Brahman, indeed, is the whole world, this widest extent.[118]

> The great sage Yajnavalkya, went to Adityaloka (the solar world). Making salutation to the resplendent Sun, he said, 'O Lord Aditya, pray relate unto me all about the truth of the Atman.'
>
> Whereupon the Lord Surya Narayana replied as follows: 'The means to attain it is the Yoga attended with the eight *Angas*, beginning with *Yama*, and replete with the knowledge "All is the Brahman; *there is no other existence apart from the Brahman*," which is presently described.'[119]

114 *Brahma-Sutras*, 2.1.6.
115 *Ibid.*, 2.1.14-20. I shall consider these *Sutras* in Chapters 8 and 9.
116 *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, 2.4.6.
117 *Chandogyopanishad*, 7.25.2.
118 *Mundakopanishad*, 2.2.11.
119 *Mandalabrah*

...*'The Not-I,'* (the body and the like that are not the Atman) *and everything else of the phenomenal world does not exist*. I, (the Atman), am the non-ailing Brahman alone.' He, who sees thus the state intermediate between existence and non-existence, (which forms the substratum of the distinct and the non-distinct), as his own Atman, (he) alone sees (and not others).[120]

...*When looked at from the point of view of truth*, O chief among the Brahmanas, *all things verily appear to be false*. Do thou give up this worldly existence, that is verily the hole wherein serpents of the form of wicked temptations abide. *Cultivating the knowledge that this* (phenomenal world) *is verily non-existent* (like the horn of a hare), do thou enter into the state of absolute existence.[121]

...All this (phenomenal world that is perceived by the mind) is verily the Brahman, that is eternal, palpably sentient and invulnerable. There is no other fancy of what is named as the mind, that is at all existent whatever, (apart from the Brahman). (Apart from the Brahman), *there is nothing whatever, which comes into existence or dies*. Nor is the existence, anywhere whatever, of the mind and its multitudinous transformations in the three worlds. *There exists, here as well as everywhere else*, (the peerless) *pure sentience alone*, unaccompanied by ideations, absolutely self-manifest, having the generic property of omnipresence and invulnerable. Whereas that (Brahman) is the eternal expansive, pure, absolute, sentience, which is devoid of torments and is quiescent, which experiences the balanced state, (*Samadhi*), of quiescence, which is the changeless Atman of sentience, this (perception, by the mind, of the phenomenal world, as really existent), fancied by itself (falsely through conceit) as the Atman, runs (through its own course). Because of its indulging in this unfading (false) ideation (of the form, that things apart from the Brahman really exist), superimposed on the pure sentience (of the Atman), but, really its own creature, the mind is so-called.

For the reason (that *Maya* is the root cause of the belief in things apart from the Brahman), what is firmly established on the basis of a fixed idea can be uprooted only through a fixed idea. The mind becomes bound through the fixed idea, 'I am not the Brahman.' The mind (likewise) is liberated through the fixed idea, 'All is the Brahman.' By conducting one's self in accord with the notions, 'I am lean; I am subject to misery; I am possessed of hands, feet and other limbs' one gets bound. By conducting one's self in accord with the notions, 'I am not subject to misery. This body is not mine. What bondage could there be in the Atman of this (individual)?' one gets liberated. 'I am not the flesh, nor the bones. I am the *Paramatman*, that is apart from the body.' He, who is inwardly convinced in the manner, rid of his ignorance, is liberated.[122]

[120]*Mahopanishad*, V. 60-69. [121]*Ibid.*, V. 164-177. [122]*Ibid.*, IV. 116-121.

Herein (in the non-dual Atman), confirming the Atman-hood and giving it up in the ego and the others, (the knower of the Brahman) should stand altogether indifferent towards them (the latter), as in the case of the pot, cloth and the like. *Forms and properties, from Brahman down to a clump of glass, are absolutely false.* Therefore, one should see his own full Atman, standing as the one Atman. (He is) himself Brahman, himself Vishnu, himself Indira, himself Shiva, and himself all this Universe; *there is nought else apart from the Atman.* All things attributed falsely to one's own Atman, which are mere phantoms, being eradicated, one's own Atman alone (remains) as the *para* (transcendent) *Brahman*, the full, the peerless, and the actionless.[123]

All the three worlds are but reflections. They are neither existent nor non-existent . . . .[124]

. . . What is known in everyday life as the *Vishva*, is *but a mere reflection* and on that account cannot be looked upon as an exclusive existence apart from it, (the Atman). Even this diversity of the world is a result of the manifestation of the Atman, as diversity is of the essence (of the Atman). This (Atman), which penetrates all things, is apparently related to all things, (should their reality be conceded). In reality, however, it does not do so, as there is no place of resort (for the Atman), apart from itself. (While there is room for thinking that) the Atman is non-existent, due to the absence of any place for shelter (it could seek), it certainly exists, for the reason that it is of the form of existence, (of something that is neither radiance, nor darkness, neither capable of being adequately described, nor capable of being distinctly seen and which is sedate and yet majestic), that it is of the form of absolute sentience and bliss.[125]

The Indivisible One Essence is that which is seen. The Indivisible One Essence is the world . . . existence . . . Atman . . . *Mantra* . . . action . . . knowledge . . . water . . . earth . . . ether . . . . O Sadanana ! *Other than the Indivisible One Essence there is nothing else, nothing else.* . . .[126]

The form of the mind is false. The form of the intellect is false. Egoism is false. As such, I am eternal, perpetual, and originless. Know that the *triad of bodies is false. The triad of durations is always false. Know that the triad of Gunas is false.* I am the pure, true Atman. Know that all scripture is false. All the Veda is always false. Know that all *Shastra* is false. I, the Atman of consciousness, am true. Know that the triad of *Murtis* is false. I am *Sadashiva*, the all-pervading of all existing things. Know the preceptor and pupil to be false, also the *Mantra* of the preceptor to be false. *Whatever is seen, know that to be false.* Do not know me, the Atman, as

[123] *Adhyatmopanishad*, 18-21.
[124] *Mahopanishad*, II. 1-11.
[125] *Anna-Purnopanishad*, V.33.
[126] *Tejo-Bindupanishad*, II. 1-23.

of that kind. What is conceivable, know that to be false. What does not swerve from the path of rectitude is always false. What is wholesome, know that to be false. Do not so know me, the Atman. *Know all living creatures to be false*; all enjoyments to be false. *What is seen and what is heard, know those to be false*, the warp and the woof, as of falsehood. Know that right and wrong action is false; what is lost and what is obtained, as of falsehood. *Know that grief and delight are false*; all and not all, to be of falsehood. Know that fullness and want are false. Good and bad conduct is of falsehood. Know that gain and loss are false. Victory and defeat are of falsehood. Know all sound to be false; all taste to be false always. Know all smell to be false; all cognition to be false always. All is always falsehood alone; every result of human existence is falsehood alone. All the *Gunas* are only falsehood. I alone am the absolute Truth.[127]

This phenomenal world does not verily exist, was not created and does not stand anywhere. It is the mind, they say, that is the phenomenal world. If the phenomenal world does not exist, does not at any time exist, there is no phenomenal world; there is no mind and the like; nor egoism; nor the *Jiva*; the work of illusion and such-like does not exist. Illusion there is not; fear there is not; the worker there is not; work there is not; neither study nor reflection; the two-fold *Samadhi* there is not; the measurer and the measure and such like are not; ignorance also is not; indiscrimination is not, at any time; neither the four requisities (learner, subject, object and the inter-relation of the subject and the object and such-like); nor the triad of relationship (intimate, conjoint, and inherent); *there is not the Ganges, nor the Gaya, nor the Setu, nor what is of the elements, nor anything else; neither the earth, nor water, nor fire, nor air, nor ether, anywhere*; neither the gods, nor the guardians of the cardinal points, nor the Vedas, nor the preceptor; neither far off, nor near, nor between the two, nor the middle, nor situated anywhere; neither non-dual, nor dual; nor truth, nor non-truth is this; bondage, release and such-like there is not; neither existence, nor non-existence, nor happiness and such-like; caste there is not; goal there is not; class by birth there is not; nor worldly custom; the creed that "All is the Brahman," there is not; even what is the Brahman, there is not; what is consciousness, there is not; nor is the talk of consciousness and 'I'; 'I am the Brahman', there is not at all; nor 'I am the ever pure' anywhere; there is not whatever is uttered by speech, what is conceived by the mind wherever, what is determined by the Intellect, nor what is known by the *Chitta* (mind). The *Yogin*, the Yoga and the like, there is not; all always is not always. Day and night and the like there is not; ablution, meditation and the like are not. Delusion and clear vision, there is not. Be thou convinced that there is no *Anatman*.

The Veda, the *Shastra*, the *Purana*, the effect, the cause, the *Ishvara*,

[127] *Tejo-Bindu Upanishad*, III. 48-59.

the *Loka*, the elements, the people, and unity, all this is falsehood, without doubt. Bondage, Liberation, happiness, misery, meditation, the mind, the gods and the demons, the accessory, the chief, the transcendent and all else, are falsehood without doubt. Whatever is uttered by speech, what is created by volitions, whatever is conceived by the mind, all is falsehood without doubt. Whatever is determined by the intellect; whatever is thoroughly cognized by the mind anywhere; whatever is propagated by the *Shastras*; *whatever is seen by the eyes alone; whatever is heard by the ears and every other happening; the eye, the ear and the body are falsehood*—that is the sure conclusion. Whatever is declared to be only 'This,' turns out to be what is 'yonder'; 'thou,' 'I,' 'that,' 'this.' 'He,' and 'I,' turn out to be only other entities. So also, whatever is considered as possible in the world, all the confusion among volitions, the various errors in attributing properties, all that has to be kept hidden, all the diverse enjoyments, all separation of faults, prove to be other entities; hence, conclude there is no *Anatman*.

'What is mine' and 'what is thine,' 'my' and 'thy,' 'on my behalf,' 'on thy behalf,' 'by me' and such-like, all that will prove futile. 'Vishnu is the protector' and the like; 'Brahma is the cause of the creation,' 'Rudra is the cause of destruction', and such-like, be convinced, that all this is falsehood. Ablution, silent prayer, penance, offering oblation, the study of the Veda, the worship of the tutelary deity, *Mantra*, the mystic formula, association with people of moral excellence, the manifestation of merit and demerit, the existence of the inner sense, the occurrence of ignorance, the myriads upon myriads of *Brahmandas*, be convinced that all this is falsehood. All the sayings and the utterances of the spiritual guides have been declarations of somebody or other. *Whatever aspect the world puts on, and whatever is seen in the world; whatever is in the world; be convinced that all that is falsehood.* What is said by some mystic symbol or other; what is prescribed by one or other; what is enumerated by someone or other; what is rejoiced in by someone or other; what is given by someone or other; *what is done by someone or other; wherever there is benevolent action; wherever there is vice; whatever you do, verily conclude that all that is falsehood.*[128]

Whatever there is of this world of phenomena; whatever there is in the world; what is of the form of the seen; what is of the form of the seer; all is like the horn of the hare which is non-existent. The earth, water, fire, air, ether, the mind, the intellect, the ego, radiance, the world, the system of worlds, decay, birth, truth, religious merit, sin, victory and others; passion, desire, anger, greed, meditation, the thing meditated upon, the transcendent quality, the preceptor, the pupil, the precept and the like, the beginning, the end, peace, auspiciousness, the past, the present, the future, the thing defined, definition, non-dualism, tranquil-

[128] *A.U.*, V. 11-53.

lity, enquiry, joy, what is of the form of the enjoyer, what is enjoyed and the like, the eight-fold Yoga of Self-control and others; what is of the nature of going and coming, the parts of anything known as beginning, middle and end; what is acceptable and what is worthy of being abandoned; Vishnu, Shiva, the senses, the mind, the triad of states also; the twenty-four *Tattvas* (basic principles), the four *Sadhanas*, the cognate, the extraneous; the worlds, *Bhur* and others in their order; all the *Varnas*, *Ashramas* and *Acharas*, the mastery of the *Mantras* and the *Tantras*; what is of the form of knowledge, ignorance and the like, all the Vedas, the non-sentient and the sentient, the division of bondage and liberation, what is of the form of knowledge and superior wisdom; what is of the form of wakening and non-wakening; talk of dualism and non-dualism; the final conclusions of all the systems of Vedanta; the determination of the import of all the *Shastras*; the existence of many entities of the *Jiva*, the determining of the one *Jiva* and the like; whatever one contemplates by the mind, whatever is wished for, wherever; whatever is reasoned by the intellect; whatever is heard from the preceptor; whatever is expounded by speech; whatever is the discourse of the *Acharya*; whatever may be perceived from the voice and by the senses; whatever is investigated upon separately; whatever has been adjudicated upon fairly by great men who are versed in the Vedas; whatever there is in the *Puranas*; incidents such as Shiva destroys the worlds, Vishnu sustains the three worlds, Brahma creates the worlds; whatever is described in the Vedas; the significance of all the Upanishads, all is like the horn of a hare which is non-existent.[129]

The multitudinous functions of the mind, the intellect, individuality and thought, are naught . . . All is absolute Brahman. There is no scriptural text; nor the word; nor the Veda; . . . *nor misdemeanour, nor rapacity, nor wickedness*, nor the outcast, nor the low-born bastard, nor what is unbearable . . . . As all is of consciousness, the multitude of sins does not exist always . . . . All the world is of the Brahman. The Self is, no doubt, Brahman. There is nothing else apart from the Self. All is only the Atman . . . There is nothing else apart from the Atman.[130]

. . . There is nowhere anything other than the Atman. There is not even a straw other than the Atman. There is not even a husk other than the Atman. . . .[131]

Whatever is seen in the world, whatever is spoken of by the people, whatever is enjoyed wherever, all that is only non-existent. Difference in the doer, difference in the act done, difference in qualities, difference in tastes and the like, difference in sex, all this is non-existence only, but is always happiness. Difference of time, difference of space, difference of substance, victory and defeat, and *whatever difference there is, all that, is*

[129] *Ibid.*, V. 75-89. [130] *Ibid.*, VI. 3-40. [131] *Ibid.*, VI. 47.

only non-existent absolutely. The inner faculties are non-existent. The organs of senses are non-existent. The vital airs, *Prana* and others are non-existent. All these together are of the nature of non-existence. What is known as the five-fold sheath is false. The five deities presiding over creation, sustenance, destruction, concealment and favour are false. The six kinds of change, being, birth, growth, ripening, decline and dissolution are false. The group of six enemies—desire, anger, greed, fascination, pride and jealousy—is non-existent. The six seasons are false. The six kinds of taste are false. I am the only Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. This world has not come into being. I am the transcendent and true Atman alone; not those other views pertaining to worldly existence. . . .[132]

Should there be any other existence apart from me, it is false, even as a mirage over a desert. Should one exist, it is tantamount to the fear engendered by the words of a sterile woman's son. Should the king of elephants be killed by the horn of a hare, that world exists. Should one be quenched of his thirst by drinking water from a mirage, let such a world exist. Should one perish by the onset of human horns, such a world exists. Should the city of the *Gandharva* castle in the air be a reality, that world always exists. Should the blue of the sky be real, that world will truly exist. Should the silver of the pearl-oyster be a true ornament, that world exists. Should man be bitten by a rope-serpent, worldly existence let there be. Should the flame of a conflagration be extinguished by an arrow made of gold, there is the world. Should rice boiled with milk be obtainable in the forest of the *Vindhyas*, that world is borne into existence. Should food be readily cooked with the fuel of plantain trunks, then will that world be. Should food be at once cooked by damsels in pictures, then will that world be. Should darkness be dispelled by lamps painted in pictures, then let that world be. Should a mortal, dead a month since, return to life again, that world will be. Should butter-milk turn into milk anywhere, that world will be eternal. Should the milk drawn from the udder of a cow go back to its original place again, that world is. Should earthy dust be raised in the mid-ocean, then, by all means, let that world be. Should an elephant be bound by the hair of a tortoise, let the world be at its zenith. Should Mount Meru be moved from its position with the thread of a lotus-stalk, that world will be. Should the ocean be tied up with the series of its billows, let that world always be. Should fire blaze forth downward, let that world always be. Should the flaming fire be cold to the touch, then that world will persist. Should lotuses thrive in a cess-pool of fire, then let the world be. Should there be a mountain of emerald, that world is. Should the Meru move and take its stand on a lotus-seed, let that world be. Should a young wasp become a border-mountain, let it be, like the Meru in motion. Should a lion be killed by a mosquito, let the world verily exist always for thee.

[132] *Ibid.*, VI. 52-72.

Should the triple world occupy the space of a pin-hole cavern, that world will be. Should the momentary grass-flame burn for ever, will that world exist. Should the thing seen in a dream persist even after waking, you may grant the existence of that world. Should the torrent of a river, by some means, remain stagnant, will that world be. Should fire prove wholesome fare for a hungry man, that moment, there will be opportunity for the world. Should the testing of gems be mastered by men born blind, that world exists always. Should the son of a eunuch take delight in intercourse with a woman, that world will be. Should a chariot be fabricated out of the horns of hares, then the world is. Should a just-born virgin be fit for intercourse, then, that world will exist. Should a sterile woman come to know of the pleasure brought on by pregnancy, this world is. Should a crow have the gait of the swan, let the world become a fixture. Should a great donkey engage a lion in fight, then the world has a standing of its own. Should a great donkey attain the gait of an elephant, then let that world be. Should the full-moon become the Sun, then, let the non-sentient world manifest itself. Should Rahu be seen apart from the Sun and the Moon, the world is seen. Should fried grains give rise to a vigorous growth, let that world be existent. Should the penurious enjoy the opulence of the rich, then exists the world. Should the lion be vanquished by the valour of dogs, then exists the world. Should the heart of the wise men be divined aright by fools, then is a pretext for the world to exist. Should the ocean be licked outright by a dog, then there is scope for the mind to exist. Should the clear sky fall over the heads of men, also should the sky fall over the earth, or should the flower of the sky (which is non-existent) smell fragrant, there is the world. Should a forest grow on the clear sky and begin to toss, then, exists the world. Should there be no reflected image in a mere mirror, then is the world.[133]

I am such a Brahman, not one of worldly existence. There is no one else besides me. Even as the foam, the waves and the like, that, taking their rise from the ocean, get dissolved in the ocean again, so also the world is dissolved in me. Therefore, there is no separate entity as the mind, nor as the illusion of the world. . . .[134]

. . .The root-cause of the conception of the non-existent phenomenal world as really existing is the *Tamodrk* (vision obscured by darkness, which screens off the real existence, the Brahman). The entire phenomenal world, which apparently exists as long as the obscured vision persists and perishes, in course of time, with the dawning of the true knowledge of the Brahman, from the Brahman (obscured by misconception) down to the *sthavara* or non-movable kingdom comprising the endless, indivisible *Brahmanda*, prodigious universe of the macrocosm, is Darkness. . . .[135]

[133] *Ibid.*, VI. 73-98.
[134] *Mahavakyopanishad*, 3-4.
[135] *Darshanopanishad*, X. 6-12.

Even as there is no son of a sterile woman, no water in desert mirage, even as there is no *Nabhovrksa* or sky-tree, *even so the real existence of the world there is not*. When the pot is grasped forcibly, the earth of which it is made manifests itself; even so, when the phenomenal world is really seen, the effulgent Brahman alone manifests itself.[136]

Know this cycle of worldly existence is what is verily a long-drawn dream, a lengthening delusion ensnaring the mind; nay, it may be characterised as indulging in building castles in the air, for a long time, and what is more a veritable ocean of sorrow. . . .By the dissolution of the (unreal) phenomenal world, which is, after all, the result of ignorance, there remains but the mind (deeply engrossed in it), assuming only my form which becomes the Brahman alone. . . .[137]

Even as, in the shell of the pearl-oyster, silver is created by *Maya*, even so, in Me alone is the world, from the *Mahatattva* onwards, created out of *Maya*. . . .[138]

This whole world the illusion-maker projects out of this (Brahman).
And in it by illusion the other (the individual soul) is confined.
Now, one should know that Nature is illusion
And that the Mighty Lord is the illusion-maker. . . .[139]

The phenomenal world is impermanent as it is produced (from Brahman which alone is real); it is similar to a world seen in a dream and an elephant in the sky (i.e. illusory); similarly, the cluster of things such as the body is perceived by a network of a multitude of delusions and it is fancied to exist as a serpent in a rope (due to imperfect knowledge).[140]

. . .*Things made of clay are considered real* (*but*) *it is verbosity* (*born of ignorance*); *the transformation is a* (*mere*) *name; that it is clay alone is the truth*.[141]

So uncompromising are the Upanishads on this matter that having affirmed the exclusive existence of Brahman, they go farther—and just to make sure that there is no lingering suspicion that world may exist in *some* sense, even if not in the obvious sense—they describe Brahman, they almost define Him *as the entity, as the residual, that is left after all phenomenal existence and all phenomenal entities have been denied.*

. . .To the extent, O best of Sages!
everything is renounced (by the mind) of its

[136] *Yogashikhopanishad*, IV. 18-20.
[137] *Varahopanishad*, II. 64-65.
[138] *Ibid*, III. 14-19.
[139] *Shvetashvataropanishad*, IV. 9-10.
[140] *Nirvanopanishad*, 28.
[141] *Parabrahmanopanishad*, 5.

own accord, to that extent, the transcendent
precept, the *Paramatman* alone remains. . . .
In the renunciation of all things, what yet remains
is said to be the Atman. . . .[142]

. . .When, in the great deluge that overtakes all, the entire phenomenal existence has attained the state of non-existence, there remains quiescence alone (of the form of the Brahman). Then there prevails the self-luminous existence that knows no setting, the originless, the transcendent, the non-ailing, that does all things, at all times, (in the character of *Ishvara*), the all-immanent, that is known as the *Paramatman*, whence articulate expressions recede baffled, that is attained by the liberated (*Jivanmukta-s* and *Videha-mukta-s* alike) for designating which, conventional terms, such as the Atman and the like, are employed as artifices and not because of their appropriateness. . . .[143]

. . .Giving up looking up to the body that has to be abandoned and also the mind that stands in need of the body as its prop, taking thy firm stand on what remains as the residual substratum, do thou become one with it, as the eternal and everlasting Brahman.[144]

. . .Giving up all conceptions, be composed entirely of what remains. Giving up the seer, seeing and what is seen, along with their impressions on the mind, seek shelter in the Atman, the first that is manifest in the seeing.[145]

Once one has come this far in denying all, one cannot then maintain that categories or states such as bondage, liberation, *Vidya*, *Avidya*, exist. Nor can one maintain that *Maya* exists as an independent entity nor indeed that it exists as an aspect or attribute of Brahman, for Brahman has been postulated as an undifferentiated, attributeless entity. Indeed one cannot even affirm, "Brahman is real," for this affirmation itself implies an entity—Brahman—and a state—reality—the latter being distinct from some other state—*un*reality.

This indeed is the extreme to which the Upanishads are driven.

. . .Bondage and liberation are the work of *Maya* and do not exist really in one's own Atman, even as, in a piece of rope remaining inactive, there is (at first generated) the optical illusion of a serpent and (then there is) its cessation. From the existence and non-existence of a veil, may be said to result bondage and liberation. There is no veiling what-

[142] *Anna-purnopanishad*, I. 40-57.
[143] *Mahopanishad*, IV. 54-57; see also the passages from *Tejo-Bindupanishad* cited earlier, especially I. 6-14, IV. 68-79.
[144] *Mahopanishad*, VI. 27-28.
[145] *Varahopanishad*, IV. 2. 18-20.

ever, of the state of the Brahman, owing to the absence of any state other than that. The conviction as to the existence and the non-existence of a thing, these two are the properties of the mind and not of that eternal entity (the Atman). Hence, both bondage and liberation are the creatures of *Maya* and are not in the Atman. Where is room for misconception in that digit-less, actionless, ever quiescent, irreproachable, smearless, peerless, transcendent truth, as in the case of ether? Hence, there is really no such thing as restraint, nor the coming into existence, nor one in the state of bondage, nor the practitioner, nor the seeker after liberation, nor even the liberated one. . . .[146]

. . .I am the Brahman alone, of the form of absolute existence, pure sentience, and unsurpassed bliss. I am not the body. Whence are birth and death for me? I am not the vital air. Whence, then, are hunger and thirst for me? I am not the mind. Whence are sorrow and delusion for me? I am not the doer. Whence, then, are bondage and liberation for me?[147]

The innermost Atman in the transcendent radiance, while what is known as *Maya* is intense Darkness. While so, how can there be the occurrence of *Maya* in the innermost Atman? Hence, by means of both logical reasoning and other testimony, as well as out of one's own experience in the *Paramatman*, which is palpable consciousness and is well established by its self-radiance alone, there is not *Maya*. This existence and non-existence of the *Maya* therein is only due to the misconception prevailing in the mind of the people and not to anything else. From the point of view of truth, it does not at all exist. Only truth exists. The popular misconception is due to the improper spreading of the light of knowledge. Light alone exists always and hence is non dual alone. Even the mention of the non-dual state is due to the improper spreading of the light of knowledge. Light alone exists always. Hence silence alone is the proper attitude to be assumed regarding this controversy.[148]

The quality of being is *Sat* or existence. Existence is the Brahman and nothing else. There is no existence apart from that. There is no such existence as *Maya* in reality. *Maya* is the creature in the Atman itself of the *Yogins*, ever betaking to meditation on the Atman and shines in the form of a witness, when affected by the knowledge of the Brahman. . . .[149]

There is not any topic of discourse known as *Anatman*; nor any function of the mind known as *Anatman*; nor any universe known as *Anatman*. Have the conviction, therefore, that there is no such thing as *Anatman*.

[146] *Atmopanishad*, 24-32. [147] *Sarva-Saropanishad*, 16-21.
[148] *Pashupatabrahmopanishad*, *Uttara-Kanda*, 16-21.
[149] *Ibid.*, *Uttara-Kanda*, 44-6.

> Have the conviction that there is no *Anatman*, by reason of the absence of all volition, by reason of being devoid of any effect; and everything being the Brahman alone absolutely; on account of the absence of the three bodies, the non-existence of the three durations, on account of the absence of the characteristics of the three *Jivas* and the absence of the three kinds of miseries (*Atmic*, *Daivic*, and *Bhautic*), the non-existence of the three worlds; and the Vedic injunction 'All is the Atman.' There is nothing that could be conceived in the absence of the mind; there is no dotage in the absence of the body; there is no goal to be reached in the absence of the feet; there is no work in the absence of the hands; there is no death in the absence of birth; there is no happiness and such-like in the absence of the intellect; there is neither upright conduct, nor cleanliness, nor truth, nor fear; there is no utterance of the sacred mystic symbol, no pupil and preceptor or such-like; there is no Second in the absence of Unity and there is no Unity in the absence of the Second.[150]

Indeed, we can no longer maintain that "existence" itself exists as a category. We cannot maintain, for instance, that "Brahman exists" for that would imply that there is an entity called "Brahman" and there is a state called "existence" (as distinct from, say, "non-existence") which now characterizes Him. This position of extreme nihilism is the only logical outcome that is possible.

> ...In the Supreme there is neither existence nor non-existence nor existence and non-existence. This is the doctrine leading to liberation. This is the doctrine of the Veda.[151]

As the assertions proceed, one after the other, the seers have to reckon with the fact that, even though on their reckoning the empirical world does not exist, almost everyone *thinks* it does. The responsibility for this state of affairs, they put on the mind.

Thus, the empirical world is presented again and again as a figment of the mind, an illusion.

> From the eternal verity of the *Paramatman* sprang forth the mind at first. This phenomenal world with its panorama of created things was spread out by the mind. With the dissolution of the mind, O Brahmana, the world of its creation also becomes void, after which thou wilt remain as the peerless sentience alone. Even as blueness with a name much more beautiful (than its significance) issues out of the expansive void of the sky, even though (such colour is) really non-existent, (even so, in the eternal verity of the *Paramatman*, are the mind and its concomitants that are non-existent, artificially generated). When the mind vanishes (into the

[150] *Tejo-Bindupanishad*, V. 15-21.
[151] *Subalopanishad*, XIII; also X, XIV and XV.

ether of sentience) with the complete obliteration of misconceptions which are the creatures of fancy, the snow-flakes of delusions relating to worldly existence melt away. Thereafter, the absolute sentience (of the Atman), which is exclusive, which is originless, which exists from beginningless time, and which has no end, shines clearly as the innermost sentience alone, even as the sky shines clear at the advent of autumn.[152]

The mind, when vitiated by the defects of passion and the like, is worldly existence. The self-same mind, when freed from them, is said to be the termination of worldly existence. A corporeal being, swayed by the mind, becomes subject to the limitations of the embodied state. When released from the hold of prejudices pertaining to the body, he is not affected by the peculiarities characteristic of the body. He makes a trice of an age and protracts a trice into an age, through his mind. It is my firm conviction that worldly existence is but the sportive display of the mind.[153]

Even though there is agreement between *Sushupti* (sleep) and *Samadhi* (concentration), in that there is the dissolution of the mind in both, still there is vast difference between the two, in that the former seeks repose in *Tamas* or darkness and in its not being the means for the attainment of liberation. In *Samadhi*, the dissolution of the phenomenal world, with its *Vikara* of *Tamas* or darkness attenuated, takes place in the consciousness, which is the Witness and is of the character of the functioning, in the indivisible expanse of the Brahman, of the mind transformed into concentration, as the phenomenal world is but the creature of the mind.[154]

When the mind moves, that is known as *Samsara* or worldly existence. The motionless state of the mind is known as Liberation. Hence, O Brahmana, one should make the mind steady with supreme wisdom. The mind is the cause of all the ends and aims of life. While it persists, the three worlds exist. When that is dissolved, the world vanishes.[155]

When one sees ignorance to be the prime cause of the phenomenal world, as earth is the prime cause in the case of the pot made of it, in accordance with all the systems of Vedanta, when that ignorance ceases to exist, where is the existence of the universe? The fool of deluded understanding sees the unreal world as real not knowing the nature of real existence, even as one, out of delusion, leaving off the rope, sees in it the serpent. When the piece of rope is distinguished, the form of the serpent disappears; when the real cause is likewise known, the phenomenal world becomes void. . . .[156]

[152] *Mahopanishad*, V. 52-53.
[153] *Ibid.*, IV. 66-69.
[154] *Mandalabrahmanopanishad*, II. III. 3,4.
[155] *Yogashikhopanishad*, VI. 58-59.
[156] *Nadabindupanishad*, 21-30.

> ...Even a little of volition denotes the triad of miseries. Desire, anger and bondage are all misery. The world is sin, assuming various forms at various times. Whatever of this cluster of all volitions, know, O Saumya (or handsome one), that to be of the mind. The mind alone is the whole universe. The mind alone is the great foe. The mind alone is worldly existence. The mind alone is the three worlds. The mind alone is the great misery. The mind alone is dotage and other miseries. The mind alone is duration of time. The mind alone is impurity. The mind alone is desire. The mind alone is the *Jiva.* The mind alone is *Chitta* (consciousness). The mind alone is individuality. The mind alone is the great bondage. The mind alone is the inner sense. The mind alone is the Earth. The mind alone is Water. The mind alone is Fire. The mind alone is the vast Atmosphere. The mind alone is Ether. The mind alone is sound, touch, form, taste and smell. These five sheaths are the products of the mind. The waking, dreaming, sleeping and other conditions are, it is said, the products of the mind. The guardians of the cardinal points, the *Vasus*, the *Rudras* and the *Adityas*, are products of the mind. What is seen, the non-sentient, the cluster of pairs of opposites and ignorance are said to be the products of the mind. Whatever is an idea of the mind, be convinced, that does not exist. The universe, there is not. The preceptor, the pupil and the like, there are not.[157]

It follows from the Upanishadic thesis then that the first step in dispelling the delusion that holds us in thrall, is to get a hold of one's mind.

This is the thread that we shall take up in Chapter 5.

But first we must pause and clear up one question: do the sectarian Upanishads—the ones the Shaivites, the Vaishnavites, the followers of Shakti swear by—do these not present a world-view that is different from the one that has been spelled out in this chapter?

[157] *Tejo-Bindu-Upanishad*, V. 96-105.

4

A DETOUR TO THE SECTARIAN UPANISHADS

Convention assigns thirty-seven of the 108 Upanishads to the three sects—eight to the adherents of Shakti, fifteen to the Shaivites and fourteen to the Vaishnavites.

These sectarian Upanishads as well as the Yoga Upanishads differ from the principal ones in two ways: they set much greater store by ritual[1]—the ritual differing from one sect to another, from one Upanishad to another; second, most of them spend a good bit of effort in insisting that *their* particular doctrine, *their* particular prescription, is superior to that of the others.

However, the view of reality that underlies these sectarian Upanishads as a whole is not, I believe, any different from the view outlined in the preceding chapter. The differences are merely ones of designation: instead of designating the first cause, the substratum, the Absolute as Brahman, they characterize it by the name of their sectarian deity—Shakti, Shiva or Vishnu. Often they assign these sectarian deities a status at par with that of Brahman; sometimes they assign the supreme status to their sectarian deity and a subordinate one to "Brahman."

But, surely, this cannot be regarded as any more than a nominal difference: after all, the name "Brahman" too is just a conventional designation.

Rituals and the procedures associated with them, of course, differ greatly as among the Upanishads. But these rituals in each case are just aids. On the most charitable interpretation they are aids which some experimental evidence has shown to be useful in the initial step that the Upanishads say has to be taken—the reining in of the mind. But that is all. Apart from this the rituals and the formulae are just empty boxes. The Upanishads assign many (and varied) meanings to the different *kriyas*, the *mantras* and the *yantras*. But, as the fact that the assignations differ so much itself shows, the meanings are not inherent in the *kriyas*, *mantras* and *yantras*. The latter are but empty boxes which come to symbolize whatever is put into them by the devotee or the aspirant.[2]

I will document the proposition that the sectarian Upanishads present the dominant doctrine merely in a different garb by citing a few passages from them that state some of the principal propositions around which

[1]In the *Yoga Upanishads*, yogic *kriyas* take the place of rituals.
[2]I will return to this matter in Chapter 8.

Chapter 3 was organized. These propositions, the reader will recall, are as follows: Brahman is an undifferentiated, non-qualified, autonomous entity; this entity is pure consciousness; Man is not the body, senses or mind; he is the Atman and the Atman is Brahman; Reality is one; Brahman exists and He is undifferentiated pure consciousness; therefore, the manifold empirical world is an illusion.

Each of these propositions can be documented at length from the sectarian Upanishads as it has been documented from other Upanishads earlier. So as not to weary the reader I will cite passages only about a few of the propositions and in each case I will keep the number of citations to the barest minimum. The task of documenting the remaining propositions and documenting the ones I choose more thoroughly, I leave as an exercise for the reader.[3]

(*i*) *Brahman is undifferentiated, unqualified, autonomous, pure consciousness:*

> May the supreme Self . . . inspire our thoughts, (our) luminous Self . . . towards the transcendental, undifferentiated Real. . . .[4]

> Milk has but a single colour
> Though drawn from diverse cows;
> As milk is knowledge known,
> Its sources are like cows.
> Focussing the eye of knowledge
> Evoke the thought: 'I am Brahman,
> The great, supreme abode without
> parts or movement, the quiescent One.'[5]

> That Brahman has no parts,
> Is beyond concepts, without blemish.[6]

> That the sentience of the Brahman is *per se* devoid of limbs, is averred in all the Upanishads and is the final conclusion arrived at by all the *Shastras.*[7]

> . . . The non-dual nature of the Brahman is alone the reality. So it has been said (in the sacred books) also. The differentiation of the Brahman has not at all been referred to. Apart from the Brahman there is nothing

[3]One feature that will at once strike the reader who undertakes this task is that contradictory passages can be cited about the propositions. I will take up the question of persisting contradictions in Chapter 9. Here it is enough to notice two facts: the degree of contradictoriness is no greater in the sectarian Upanishads than it is in the other Upanishads and, secondly, no alternative, consistent world-view emerges from them as a whole than from the other Upanishads.

[4]*Tripuratapinyupanishad*, I. 14. [5]*Ibid.*, V. 22, 23. [6]*Ibid.*, V. 11.

[7]*Tripad-Vibhuti-Maha-Narayanopanishad*, I.II. 7, 8.

else. Reference to the difference subsisting among the quarters and the like is verily the description of the form of the Brahman alone. . . .[8]

This is verily the changeless one, for the reason that it is peerless and non-differentiated. . . . Though essentially changeless in its character, it being the Brahman that is void of all attributes, there is nothing by way of differentiation in the *Turya-Turiya*, there is nothing at all of the character of difference, it being the *Avikalpavikalpa*, the changeless state of the changeless entity that has no counterpart. . . . Should anyone conceive of anything by way of even reflections of differentiation in the *Turya-Turiya* and assume its being broken into hundreds and thousands of fragments, that person, with his faculties demented, will attain death after death, passing through series of births and deaths, without attaining the final beatitude of the *Turya*. That *Turya-Turiya* that is devoid of the dual perception, that is self-manifest, the absolute sentience, the unceasing heap of bliss, is the *Turiyatman* alone, that is immortal, devoid of the fear of dual perception, the Brahman that is peerless and devoid of the fear of differentiation, the Brahman that is verily devoid of the fear of differentiation. He who knows thus, becomes the Brahman alone. . . .[9]

Then spoke (Prajapati) unto them: 'That. . . is verily this Brahman, that is really non-dual, is eternal because of its fully-blown super-abundant and prodigious form of infinite, non-differentiated and peerless existence, sentience and bliss. . . .'[10]

. . . Hence Krishna alone is the supreme self-manifest radiance. . . .[11]

This radiant god . . . that is the self-luminous substratum of sentience. . . .[12]

Those men of fortitude, who see in the middle of the heart, the most excellent Self-luminous Lord of the universe. . . the *Purusha* that in his fullness is potent enough to eclipse the phenomenal world of ignorance constituted of the five elements and their variants and remain as the peerless Brahman, the self-luminous substratum of sentience. . . .[13]

The blessed Lord spoke to them: 'By means of the fourth and final *Maya*, has the supreme Brahman been indicated, the supreme Person, the supreme Self, whose essence is consciousness. The hearer, the thinker, the seer, the teacher, the toucher, the proclaimer, the cognizer, the supreme knower, the inner person in all persons—that Self must be cognized. In that there are neither worlds seen nor unseen; no gods or

[8] *Ibid.*, IV. 2, 3.
[9] *Nrisimha-Tapinyupanishad, Uttara-Tapini*, VIII. 5.
[10] *Ibid., Uttara-Tapini*, IX. 17.
[11] *Gopala-Tapinyupanishad, Gopala-Purva-Tapini*, VI. 46-9.
[12] *Atharvasiropanishad*, 61-2.
[13] *Ibid.*, 63-5.

demons; beasts or non-beasts; ascetics or non-ascetics; outcastes or non-outcastes; brahmins or non-brahmins. Alone and single, the supreme Brahman, all-quiet, shines forth. Gods, seers, manes, prevail not there. The awakened knower, the all-knower is Brahman.'[14]

Having thus realized the real form resting in the innermost cavern of the heart-lotus of all beings, of the *Paramatman*, who is digitless (being beyond the pale of the sixteen *Kalas*, beginning from the '*Prana*' and ending with '*Naman*'), who is peerless (being without a counterpart to match), who is the all-witness, who is devoid of any differentiation as an entity standing apart from the distinctly manifest gross cosmos and the indistinct and subtle chaos, who is of the form of pure sentience, in this manner, in the attitude, 'I am of that non-differentiated form alone,' simultaneously with such realization, one attains the form of the *Paramatman* alone and attains *Kaivalya*.[15]

(*ii*) *The Atman and Brahman are one:*

Om! Salutation unto the Lord, Vishnu, the Atman immanent in all beings, Vasu-deva, the basis for the identity of all Atman Salutation![16]

For the reason (that the Lord is indicated by the *Om-kara*, whose import is the Brahman), with the firm conviction of the form, 'I am the Brahman, that transcends *Rajas*, (mobility indicative of the three *Guna-s*),' one should conceive of himself in the attitude 'I am *Gopala*, the *Paramatman*.' By doing so, he attains liberation. He attains the state of the Brahman. He becomes the knower of the Brahman. He recognizes the *Go-pa-s*, that is to say, the *Jiva-s*, as of the character of his own Atman and takes them under his protection, till the time of the great deluge, preparatory to the next creation He becomes *Go-pala*. 'Om! that (transcendent Brahman) is the infinite existence. That (Brahman) am I. The transcendent Brahman of the character of Krishna, that is of the form of the one everlasting bliss, that I am. Om! that (transcendent Brahman) is the infinite existence. I alone am *Go-pala*. The transcendent, truthful existence that stands unaffected by the bondage (of worldly existence), that I am.' Conceiving himself in the aforesaid attitude, one should bring about the identity of the Atman, with his own mind. One should conceive of the Atman in the attitude, 'I am *Go-pala*.' That *Gopala* alone is the non-distinct, endless and eternal (*Paramatman*).[17]

. . .The one radiant Lord is immanent in all beings, pervades all, is the *Antar-atman* immanent in the innermost core of all beings, is the control-

[14] *Tripuratapinyupanishad*, V. 2-3. [15] *Kaivalyopanishad*, 24.
[16] *Gopala-Tapinyupanishad*, *Gopala-Purva-Tapini*, II. 17-24.
[17] *Ibid.*, *Gopalottara-Tapini*, 30.

ler of all action, abides as the regulator immanent in all beings, is the sentient principle, that witnesseth (all functionings) and the absolute, innermost sentience devoid of all properties. . . .[18]

. . .'Thou art the Brahman. I am the Brahman. There is no difference between us both. Thou art I alone. I am thou alone.' After duly initiating the *Upasaka* in this manner, by muttering (into his right ear), *Adi-narayana* suddenly vanished. . . .[19]

. . .(The sentience known as) Narayana, that is established in all beings, is, after all, one alone (even like the ether of the pots and pans, which, whether the pots and pans are broken or remain intact, is after all one with the vast expanse of the peerless, non-differentiated ether). What is looked upon as the prime cause (of all phenomenal existence) is, in reality, the *Parabrahman*, that has no cause of its own, (*i.e.*, is in no way subject to the relationship of cause and effect, it being peerless and non-differentiated). This is the sum and substance of the crest of the *Atharva-veda*. . . .[20]

. . .Unto this one reality, non-differentiated from the inner-most Atman, the absolute, self-manifest radiance, the *Paramatman*, we shall bestow the god of death as the fittest sacrificial offering. Hence has he been described as *Mrityumrityum*.[21]

. . .One should firmly cling to the belief that this Atman of the triple sheath, (which apparently shares, on that account, the characteristics of the *Anatman*), is really the peerless, unsurpassed *Parabrahman* of the three sheaths, (which is really devoid of such triple differentiation), and should repeatedly assume the attitude, 'I am this (Brahman) alone' till he attains the actual perception of the Brahman. . . .[22]

. . .The Atman is verily the one essence of sentience.[23]

This *Turya-Turiya* which passively bears testimony to the (functioning) eye. . .ear. . .organ of speech. . .which, in fact, passively bears testimony to all. . . is the great sentience which is the real form of my own Atman. . . and which is the Brahman alone.[24]

This *U-kara* alone is the '*Nri*'. . . . This '*Nri*' alone is verily the all-embracing Atman, always everywhere. This *Simha* (Lion) is the *Paramatman*. . . .

[18]*Ibid.*, *Gopalottara-Tapini*, 62-66.
[19]*Tripad Vibhuti-Maha-Narayanopanishad*, II. VI. 24, 25.
[20]*Narayanopanishad*, IV.
[21]*Nrisimha-Tapinyupanishad*, *Purva-Tapini*, II. 16.
[22]*Ibid.*, *Uttara-Tapini*, I. 3, 4.
[23]*Ibid.*, *Uttara-Tapini*, II. 3.
[24]*Ibid.*, *Uttara-Tapini*, I. 11.

This *Paramatman* remaining as the all-penetrating Atman everywhere, at all times and under all circumstances, consumes all things apart from his own Atman. . . . This alone is '*Aham*' (I) being the innermost sentience that forms the basis of the settled faith in the conception of 'I', the real Atman. In this manner should the knower of the Brahman, firmly convinced in the identity of the innermost Atman with the transcendent Brahman, steadily apply himself to the *Anustubh* in praise of *Nrisimha* as identical with the Brahman alone.[25]

. . .Unto this alone I make salutation as the innermost Atman non-differentiated from the *Paramatman*; this is verily the all-pervading. This alone am I, being the innermost sentience that forms the basis of the apprehension of the conception of 'I,' the real Atman, this is verily the all-pervading. . . .[26]

. . .This infinite, real existence is the Atman, is the Brahman alone. This Brahman is the Atman alone, in this phenomenal existence alone and should, under all circumstances not be a subject-matter of doubt for anyone. This is the truth and nothing but the truth. With this sure conviction one should mutter, '*Om*'!, thoroughly identifying himself with his own Atman, with the Brahman of all and with the *Turyomkara* '*Om*'. . . .[27]

. . .The Atman is identical with Rama. . . .[28]

. . . The *Yogin* knows my form, through real devotion, as of the non-dual Brahman, that has neither beginning, nor middle, nor end, as the manifestation of the Atman, which is the absolute existence, pure sentience and unsurpassed bliss, and which is wasteless.[29]

There are two *Suparnas* (kinds of birds) placed together in this (cage-like) body of ours and known as the *Jiva* and *Isha*. Of the two, the *Jiva* eats the fruit of all actions but the great *Ishvara* does not. The *Maheshvara* is stationed in the body merely as the witness, not partaking in the enjoyment, and manifests himself of his own accord. Differentiation between the two has been artificially created by *Maya* alone. Even as the ether (*akasha*) of the pot and the ether of the monastery are being artificially treated as different from the vast expanse of ether (of which they are but parts), so parts of the same *Parama* (the transcendent Brahman) are artificially differentiated as of the form of the *Jiva* and *Shiva* (out of ignorance of their identity). In reality, however, Shiva is the sentience of

[25] *Ibid.*, *Uttara-Tapini*, IV. 4.
[26] *Ibid.*, *Uttara-Tapini*, V. 1.
[27] *Ibid.*, *Uttara-Tapini*, IX. 17.
[28] *Rama-Tapinyupanishad*, *Purva-Tapini*, IV. 1.
[29] *Vasu-Devopanishad*, 11-16.

the Brahman directly realized, and the *Jiva* in his real form is always the self-same (sentience of the Brahman). (One form of) sentience (Shiva) differs from (the other form of) sentience (Jiva) only in outward aspect (due to the difference of *Upadhi*), but is not inherently differentiated from the other, for the reason that the lack of sentience (in either of them) will entail their ceasing to be forms of the Supreme Sentience altogether. Sentience is not different from sentience, but becomes differentiated only in external aspect (through difference in *Upadhi*) which is of the form of non-sentience. Should there be any differentiation at all (between the *Jiva* and the *Isha* that is Shiva), the difference is only in the external non-sentient aspect, as sentience is verily one and indivisible always, for the reason that (it is in no way affected by *Upadhi* at all, and also because) the oneness of sentience has been established beyond doubt by ratiocination (*Tarka*), as well as through *Pramana* or valid testimony (i.e. of the Vedas as also of one's own experience from actual realization).[30]

He who, after burning up his body (and through that, all concomitants of ignorance) with the fire of Shiva, that throws into the background all inauspicious forms of phenomenal existence, kneads the ashes with the shower of nectar, generated by the conjunction of *Shakti* and *Soma* (Shiva) through adopting the course of *Sushmna-yoga*, with the grace of the *Paramatman*, Shiva, will attain the direct perception of the Brahman non-differentiated from the innermost Atman and, simultaneously therewith, will attain the immortal state of remaining as the incorporeal Brahman alone.[31]

Thus with the words *Sa nah parsad ati durgani vishva*, She illuminates the supreme, She who is the inner-Self. . . .[32]

In wakeful state, in dreams, in sleep
Know that the Self is only one;
For one who passes beyond these states
Rebirth there is none.
One real Self alone exists
In diverse beings; as one,
Or many is it seen, like
Moon in water's sheen.
As when a pot is moved,
The sky, pot-bound, moves not—
So is the living Self unmoved,
Like sky when only pot has moved.
When repeated in different forms,

[30] *Rudrahridayopanishad*, 41-46.
[31] *Tripuratapinyupanishad*, II. 13.
[32] *Brihajjabalopanishad*, II. 19

Like pot from pot distinct,
He knows not in these divisions,
And yet at all times knows.[33]

She alone is Atman. Other than Her is untruth, non-self. Hence is She Brahman-Consciousness, free from (even) a tinge of being and non-being. She is the Science of Consciousness, non-dual Brahman Consciousness, a wave of Being-Consciousness-Bliss. . . . So here is the *Mahatripura-sundari* who assumes all forms. You and I and all the world and all divinities and all besides are the *Mahatripura-sundari*. The sole Truth is the thing named 'the Beautiful.' It is the non-dual, integral, supreme-Brahman.

The fivefold form relinquished,
And effects like space transcended,
Remains the one, the great being,
The supreme Ground, the only Truth.[34]

. . .The lord of the *Pashus* (the *Jivas* that are bound by the bond of ignorance of the Atman), *Parameshvara*, though himself accomplished with the powers of sentient action, knowledge and desire when acting as though influenced by individuality, is known as the *Jiva* swirling in worldly existence. He (the *Isha*, behaving very much like the *Jiva*) is alone as the *Pashu*. Thus the identity between the *Jiva* and Shiva becomes established. 'The prime cause, having brought about the effect itself attains, as it were, the state of the effect.' 'The *Jiva* is Shiva and Shiva is the *Jiva*. The reputed *Jiva* is Shiva alone,' says the *Shruti*. . . .[35]

(iii) *Brahman, the pure Consciousness, alone exists; all else is false:*

First we have to establish that *Reality is one, without differentiation, without parts*

As long as illusions of words
Encompass one, difference lasts;
When darkness is scattered,
It is unity one sees.[36]

. . .Even as, through knowing a clod of earth alone, O Gautama, everything made of earth becomes known, as the article made of earth, the effect is in no way different from earth, its cause, even as through a jewel made of gold, everything made of that metal becomes known, even as, through paring off the nails once with a nail-cutter, every article made of black iron becomes known as in no way different from the nail-cutter

[33] *Ibid.*, V. 14-18.
[34] *Bhavrichopanishad*, 5-6.
[35] *Jabalyupanishad*, 10-15.
[36] *Tripuratapiniyupanishad*, V. 18

the Brahman alone. All this phenomenal existence that is so replete with falsehood, non-sentience and misery, with the removal of the ignorance of the real nature of the Atman occasioning it, verily becomes the infinite existence, the supreme sentience and the unsurpassed bliss of the Brahman alone, All this is existence. . . .[39]

. . .Thou alone transcendest all esoteric knowledge. Thou alone art the totality of all causes. Thou alone art all causes in their individual aspect. Thou alone art indivisible bliss. Thou alone art bliss in all its fullness. . . . Whatever is believed to be apart from thee all that is vitiated (by *Maya*) —this is my firm conviction. . . .[40]

. . .The Brahman is one alone and is peerless. Herein there is no scope whatsoever for the many. Hence all things apart from the Brahman are the concomitants of absurdity (and are merely the products of ignorance). The real existence, (which is not subject to any absurdity), is the *Parabrahman* alone. The real existence, that is the infinite sentience, is the Brahman. . . .[41]

. . .This Atman, (the *Turya-Turiya*) (that is reputed to be the *Avikalpa-vikalpa*), the lord, *Nrisimha*, (that destroys the demon of the delusion relating to the existence of things apart from the Atman), is of the form of sentience alone. Looking into the real nature of all phenomenal existence as apart from the Atman is based on misconception, while looking into the real nature of all phenomenal existence as the Atman alone is subject to no misconception. The accomplishment of dual existence (by the Atman) is nowhere, at no time, and under no circumstances possible, as there is little scope for the Atman to identify itself with anything apart from it, as there is absolutely nothing apart from the Atman. Thus is accomplished the Atman alone as absolutely non-dual and without a counterpart, (through the negation of all things apart from it).[42]

Ye ignorant folk, do ye direct your minds, through the penance of investigation in the right direction, to assume the attitude, 'I am the Brahman of the name of Rudra.' What is Rudra (that drives away the disease of the delusion relating to things apart from the Brahman), the eternal and the most ancient food to be ardently longed for, is the Brahman of the name of Rudra alone. Apart from that there is nought.[43]

. . .So also I am this *Vishva* which manifests itself in various and variegated forms, embracing as I do all of them, and there is not even an atom

[39]*Nrisimha-Tapinyupanishad, Uttara-Tapini*, VII. 5.
[40]*Tripad-Vibhuti-Maha-Narayanopanishad*, I. I. 1.
[41]*Ibid.*, I. III. 2.
[42]*Nrisimha-Tapinyupanishad, Uttara-Tapini*, IX. 2.
[43]... 67.

existent apart from me . . . . I know perfectly well that apart from me, the Brahman, there is nought . . . .[44]

. . . With the knowing of the fivefold Brahman, consisting of *Sadyojata* and others, as the preliminary step, one should know that all this phenomenal world is the *Parabrahman*, Shiva, of the character of the fivefold Brahman, nay he should know whatever is seen or heard of or falls within or lies beyond the range of his inner and outer senses, as Shiva of the character of the fivefold Brahman alone. On knowing the real character of that phenomenal world of the fivefold character (made of the five elements), known as the creature of the Brahman, but really superimposed on the Brahman out of misconception, that very moment the seeker surrenders himself unto *Ishana*, the *Paramatman*, and attains the exalted state of *Ishana* alone. After causing everything of the character of the fivefold Brahman to dissolve in his own innermost Atman which is non-differentiated from the Brahman, the knower should realize Shiva, the Brahman of the fivefold character, in the attitude, 'I am he,' and attain the immortal state of the Brahman of the form of Shiva. . . .[45]

. . . There is nothing else apart from me. I alone am all . . . .[46]

All that (worldly existence) which manifests itself very much like the rope snake bears the aspect of verisimilitude. This *Akshara* or imperishable (Brahman) alone is the truth by knowing which the seeker is liberated. . . .[47]

This (*Maya*), though non-differentiated in point of potency, is of various and variegated manifestations, is firmly established with the latent impressions and proclivities of various incarnations, in virtue of which it develops and sends out innumerable sprouts; though one by itself, it is of various qualities, and is likewise of multiform qualities in its multifarious sprouts as well, pervading everywhere, at all times and under all circumstances, in the form of Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the sustainer) and Shiva (the destroyer) and resplendent with the sentience of the *Swadhisthana*, (the seat of the Atman), like a mass of white-hot iron. (Even as it is not the white-hot mass of iron that has the property of burning, but it is the fire alone which has the appearance of the white-hot mass of iron, even so, it is not the *Maya*, that apparently manifests itself as resplendent, that is really self-manifest, but it is the Atman alone [whose real form, the *Maya* veils] that is really self-manifest). Hence arises (through *Maya* alone) the threefold character of even the Atman, (due to his being considered the basis of the Trinity, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva) and his being looked

[44] *Kaivalyopanishad*, 20-3.
[45] *Panchabrahmopanishad*, 24-32.
[46] *Bhasmajabalopanishad*, II. 26-29.
[47] *Rudrahridayo*[illegible]

upon as the prime source of all things, at all times and all places and under all circumstances.[48]

Knowing It as beyond concepts,
Endless, without cause or parallel;
Immeasurable and beginningless,
The man of wisdom is released.
There is no restriction, no origin;
None in bondage; none who strives;
None seeks liberation; aye, none
Liberated—this is truth.[49]

As in the case of the non-sectarian Upanishads, here also the denial of the existence of the phenomenal world is pushed to the limit—it is made a part of the description of Brahman Himself. Once again, Brahman is described as the residual that is left after all phenomenal existence has been denied.

That which is the substratum of all things individually, indicated by the term 'Thou' of the sacred text, 'That thou art,' which is the substratum of all things collectively, indicated by the term 'That' of the sacred text, which is the little substratum that remains after the rejection of all things apart from it, and is attained after an exhaustive denial of the existence of all such things, that which is believed to be the substratum o the entire universe but really transcends the entire universe superimposed on it, that great transcendent entity, the *Parabrahman*, is the all-Atman (immanent in the innermost core of all), the super-abundant one, devoid of beginning, middle or end and other tripartite divisions and differentiations, what is subtler than the subtlest ideations of the mind, and is yet in reality devoid of grossness, subtlety or extent, the eternal being of the form of infinite existence, that alone is the Brahman, which forms the basis of the denial of the totality of phenomenal existence. That (Brahman) alone is indicated by the term 'Thou' which forms the basis of the denial of phenomenal existence individually. What is indicated by the term 'Thou' is alone indicated by the term 'That,' and not otherwise. . . .[50]

Passages of this kind, passages that restate the propositions of Chapter 3 can be multiplied many times over. I believe, however, that the few representative ones that have been cited must have been enough to convince the reader that a plausible case can indeed be made out in favour of the argument that the world-view underlying the sectarian Upanishads is the same as the one that dominates the principal and other non-sectarian Upanishads.

[48] *Nrisimha-Tapinyupanishad, Uttara-Tapini*, IX. 6.
[49] *Tripuratapinyupanishad*, V. 12, 13.
[50] *Kaivalyopanishad*, 16-19; see also *Nrisimha-Tapinyupanishad, Uttara-Tapini*, I. 10, 11.

endless, the immeasurable, the indivisible and the entirely full is the Brahman. What is non-dual and the exquisitely blissful, the pure, the awakened and the emancipated, the real existence pervading through the real form of the Atman, the non-differentiated and the non-limited is the Brahman What is the supreme existence, sentience and bliss, manifest of its own accord is the Brahman. What is beyond the range of the mind and articulate expression, is the Brahman. What is beyond the reach of all testimony, is the Brahman. What is knowable through all the known systems of Vedanta, is the Brahman. What is incapable of being determined by the circumstances of time, place and substance, is the Brahman. What is the fullness of all, is the Brahman. What is the *Turiya*, the aspectless, the one absolute, is the Brahman. What is the non-dual, the indescribable, is the Brahman. What is the character of the *Pranava*, is the Brahman. What is described to be of the character of the *Pranava*, is the Brahman. What is of the character of all the *Mantra*-s, such as the *Pranava*, is the Brahman. What may be characterized as being comprised of four quarters, is Brahman.[52]

... He alone is the *Turiya-Brahman*. He alone is the *Turiyatita*. He alone is the all-pervading Vishnu. He alone is the transcendent radiance, worthy of being described by all the sacred texts indicative of the Brahman. He alone is beyond the influence of *Maya*, (illusion). He alone is beyond the influence of the three *Guna*-s. He alone is unaffected by time. He alone is not subject to the limitations imposed by all actions and austerities. He alone is not conditioned by any word of promise. He alone is the transcendent overlord. He alone is the *Purusha* of hoary antiquity, who is acclaimed by the *Pranava* and all other *Mantra*-s, who is devoid of beginning and end, who is ever full of the harmonious perception of primordial space, time and substance and who is the *Turiya*, (the fourth part, transcending the other three), who is full, who is firmly resolved to uphold the truth, who delights in his own self, whose own real form is unaffected by the three durations, (the past, the present and the future). who is self-luminous, who is full of his own glory, who is devoid of any other peer possessed of the same seat as his, who is devoid of any other peer in the same predicament as he, or any other in any way superior to him, who recognizes no divisions, such as day and night, who recognizes no divisions of time, such as the year, and the like, whose glory, being full of the bliss of the Brahman, is endless and incomprehensible, who is worthy of being described by expressions such as, the Atman, the *Antaratman* (immanent in all), the *Paramatman* (that transcends all), the *Jnanatman* (attainable through the right kind of knowledge), the *Turiyatman* (the Atman of the fourth dimension) and the like, who is the non-dual, transcendent bliss, the glorious Lord, who is eternal, stainless, devoid of misconceptions, detached, and indescribable, that pure radiance, Narayana, is one alone.

[52]*Tripad-Vibhuti-Maha-Narayanopanishad*, I. 1. 5.

There is no peer to match him whatsoever—Thus.[53]

They, (the knowers of the Brahman), opine that the fourth quarter (of the *Pranava*) is that which is not sentient inwards, (owing to the absence of *Vasana*-s), which is not sentient outwards, (owing to the absence of the phenomenal world), which is not sentient both ways, (either in the waking or the dreaming state), which is not sentient (owing to the absence of change), nor non-sentient (because of the absence of the cessation of perception), which is not palpable sentience, (owing to the cessation of perception through the inner senses), which is unseen, which is incapable of being discoursed upon, (as it is beyond the range of the mind and speech, which is incapable of being grasped, (as it is beyond the range of perception), which is undefinable, which is incomprehensible, which is unnameable, which is the essence of the apprehension of the one Atman, which is the residuum left after the dissolution of the phenomenal world, and which is the tranquillized, auspicious sentience alone without a counterpart, (the *Turya-turiya*). That is the *Paramatman*, that should be actually realized by all seekers as their own Atman.[54]

The Goddess who is the great Illusion . . . She is the essence of the intelligent and the inert. She is all, from Brahman to stocks and stones. . . .[55]

. . .He who is Rudra, who is also Brahman, *Bhur*, *Bhuvar*, *Suvar* . . . of the form embracing the entire Universe . . . is also *Maheshwara* . . . *Uma* . . . *Vinayaka* . . . *Skanda* . . . *Indra* . . . *Agni* . . . *Mahar* . . . *Taploka* . . . *Satya-loka* . . . *Prithvi* . . . the waters . . . fire . . . air . . . ether . . . sun . . . moon . . . stars . . . eight planets . . . *prana* . . . *Kala* . . . *Yama* . . . *Mrityu* . . . immortal existence . . . the three durations . . . also the All . . . phenomenal existence . . . the *Satya* . . . *Om*. He who is Rudra, the illustrious lord, the one absolute Brahman art thou; also what is indicated by the numerals, one, two and three, that thou art, what is above and what is below, that also thou art; thou art the quiescence, wherein all ignorance finds its repose; thou art the strength of opulence; thou art the bliss of contentment; thou art what is the oblation and what is not; thou art the universe that is superimposed on thee and the universe that is rejected as apart from thee; thou art what is given away and what is not given away; thou art the austerity that is performed in expectation of a fruit and the austerity performed in expectation of no fruit or recompense; thou art the transcendent prime cause and the non-transcendent effect of such cause and also the final resort of the multitudes of creatures that are but parts of thine own form.[56]

[53] *Ibid.*, I. 1. 11.
[54] *Nrisimha-Tapiny upanishad*, *Purva-Tapini*, IV. 7.
[55] *Sitopanishad*, 5. 9.
[56] *Atharvasiropanishad*, 40.

. . . I, conjoint with *Uma*, am the source of all that has been, that continues to be generated in various and variegated forms, and all that is yet to be. I am the great *Rishi* (the seer of Vedic *Mantra*-s). I am Rudra (the prime cause of all and yet) transcending all the universe. I do see (with my eyes) *Hiranyagarbha* and other Prajapatis that are yet to come into existence. I alone am Rudra that has, in this manner, entered into fire, water, herbs and the core of all beings of this universe. I alone am the innermost Atman (non-differentiated from the Brahman), that is immanent in all as the *Antaratman*, the radiance of the Brahman, transcending which, transcending me, there is nought else. I alone am the transcendent Brahman that transcends the entire universe (that owes its origin to me).[57]

. . . Therein the seeker should worship me alone resorted to by *Yatins* as the *Linga* which is of the real form of radiance (that ought to be resorted to by all), which is not internally defiled (and, being beyond the range of knowledge, has to be taken as the non-differentiated Brahman alone), which is imperishable, which has neither beginning nor end, which could be comprehended only through a knowledge of all the Vedas and Vedantas, which is undemonstrable, inexplicable and infallible, which is worthy of being approached (only in the attitude, 'I am the Brahman'), which is non-dual, which is the prop of all and does not itself stand in need of any prop, which is not perceptible as anything apart from itself, which is ever served by Brahma, Vishnu, Purandara and other exalted ones among the immortal gods; that (*Jyotirlinga*) ought to be resorted to (as the main prop) . . . .[58]

That which is the main support of all, which is non-dual, is the transcendent Brahman that is ancient, that is of the form of infinite existence (*sat*), pure sentience (*chit*) and unsurpassed bliss (*ananda*), lying beyond the range of speech and the mind. When that (Brahman) is fully realized, O Shuka, everything here would have been thoroughly realized. As all things are of the character of that (Brahman), verily there is nothing at all anywhere that is different from that (Brahman).[59]

These and similar *portmantau* accounts are no different from the ones given in the principal Upanishads or the *Samanaya-Vedanta, Yoga* and *Sanyasa Upanishads*.[60]

But how is one to explain the numerous, fanciful and poetic descriptions that the sectarian Upanishads give of their particular deities—Shiva, Vishnu, Rama, Krishna, Sita, Garuda and others? Is there nothing to these

[57] *Bhasmajabalopanishad*, II. 5-7. [58] *Ibid.*, II. 18-20.

[59] *Rudrahirdayopanishad*, 26-7.

[60] Instead of reproducing another set of passages I leave the documentation of this point as an exercise for the reader. He may as well begin his search with the following passages: *Tejo-Bindupanishad*, I. 6.-14; *Darshanopanishad*, IX. 1-5, X. 1-12; *Nadabindu-*

accounts? Does the fact that these Upanishads set store by these poetic flights not imply that they contain a world-view different from the dominant one presented in Chapter 3 and the one that has been reiterated here?

I do not think so. But before I give the reasons for this conclusion, let us first go through some of the descriptions of the sectarian deities as given in the Upanishads. The fanciful descriptions themselves will suggest the reasons on account of which they can be safely disregarded.

Here is an account of Garuda:

> . . .(One should meditate on) Garuda, the favourite of Hari, with his right foot in the *Svastika*-posture, (crosswise), and his left foot bent, with his fore-arms clasped in the attitude of prayer, *Ananta* (the serpent), forming his left wristler, *Vasuki* forming the sacrificial thread, the *Taksaka*, his hip-string. His garland is said to be *Karkotaka*. On his right ear is the *Padma* and on his left the *Mahapadma*. In the region of his crest is the *Shankha* and between the shoulders is the *Gulika*. Him, who has the *Paundra-kalika* and the *Nagaka*, (the white and the dark serpents), playing the role of *Chamara*-s, (fan-like deer-tails), and is served by the *Elaputraka*, *Naga* and others, who is filled with exhilaration, who has eyes of a tawny colour and mighty wings with gold-like lustre, who has long arms and capacious shoulders and is decked with snakes as ornaments, who is of a golden complexion up to the knee, of a snow-white colour up to the hips, of the colour of vermillion up to the neck and with a face resembling a hundred moons, whose beak and mouth are of a dark-blue colour, who is decked with big and beautiful ear-rings, whose face is frightful with tusks, and crest radiant with a crown, him whose limbs are of the colour of vermillion and whose face is bright-white like the *Kunda*-flower and the Moon, one should meditate on (this) Garuda bejewelled with snakes, three times a day . . . .[61]

And here are two of several descriptions of Vishnu:

> . . . Thereafter, he saw (the Lord *Nrisimha*) full of radiance, in the embrace of the Goddess Lakshmi, perched on his vehicle of *Suparna*, (Garuda), with his crest covered by the hood of *Adishesa*, with the face of a lion and the body of a human being, and three eyes of the character of the Sun, the Moon and fire, the carrier of sacrificial offerings, (standing before him, with his real *A-vyakta* form concealed in the distinct

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panishad, 17-20; *Yogakundalyupanishad*, III. 24, 25; *Yogashikhopanishad*, III. 11-21; *Sandilyopanishad*, II. 4, 5; *Adhyatmopanishad*, 61-4; *Anna-purnopanishad*, IV. 62-80; *Atmopanishad*, 1-4; *Mahopanishad*, IV. 54-7; *Muktikopanishad*, II. 72; *Shuka-Rahasyopanishad*, 19-22; *Sarva-Saropanishad*, 16-21. Conversely, to get descriptions of Brahman in the sectarian Upanishads that match typical descriptions—for instance, the *neti, neti* enumerations—of the non-sectarian Upanishads, the reader can start, eg., with *Nrisimha-Tapinyupanishad*, IX. 18 or *Rama-Tapiny upanishad*, *Uttara-Tapini*, II. 9-14.

[61] *Garudopanishad*, 2-5.

radiant and auspicious form of *Nri-simha*, corresponding, out of the plenitude of his grace, to reward *Parama-sthin* for his penance.[62]

> One should meditate upon me, who abides in the heart, with the distinguishing mark of the *Sri-vatsa* on my breast, and with my pair of feet marked with the designs of the divine banner, surmounted with the badge of my favourite Garuda, umbrella and other distinguishing marks, upon me, who am effulgent with the lustre of my *Kaustubha*-gem, with my four arms wielding the Conch, the Discus, the *Sarnga*-bow, the Lotus-flower and the Mace, with beautiful *Keyura*-s on the upper arms, with my neck adorned with garlands, donning a lustrous crown, with the right hand assuming the *Abhaya* pose, with *Makara* (fish-like) ear-rings throbbing with lusture, upon me of a golden complexion and a charming frame, bestowing the boon of immunity from fear on my devotees. One should always meditate on me or my image, holding the flute and the horn (in the two hands), in the recess of his heart. . . .[63]

And here is one of several descriptions of Krishna:

> . . . (The form he assumes is) the guise of a cow-herd, sublime like the ocean and resting under the *Kalpaka* tree, (ever prone to bestow their heart's desires on his devotees). Here occur these verses (dealing with the same subject). "By meditating on him, whose eyes resemble the flawless white lotus flowers, who is of the colour of the cloud and is clad in garments that are lustrous like lightning, who has two arms, who assumes the *Chin-mudra*-posture (with his right hand), who is the *Ishvara* adorned with the garlands of wood-flowers, who is surrounded on all sides by *Go-pa*-s, (typifying *Jiva*-s), *Go-pi*-s (typifying *Maya*) and cows (typifying the Vedas, all of them seeking asylum under him), who has his favourite resort at the foot of the *Kalpaka* tree, who is richly adorned, who rests in the middle of a ruby-coloured lotus, who is fanned by soft, mild and gentle zephyrs occasioned by the ripples of the *Kalindi*-river (the Jamuna), by meditating on this Krishna with a full heart, one is released from the bonds of worldly existence.[64]

The descriptions of Rama, Sita and Lakshmana are certainly not austere:

> . . . Having incarnated in this world along with Sita, he shines as the Moon with the charming light; with Sita ever by his side, even as the *Purusha* ever attended with *Prakrti*, (the primordial originant out of which sprang forth phenomenal existence), this Rama of a dark-blue (cloud-like) complexion, wearing a yellow robe and with matted hair over his

[62] *Avyaktopanishad*, II. 2.
[63] *Gopala-Tapinyupanishad*, *Gopalottara-Tapini*, 46-61.
[64] *Ibid.*, *Gopala-Purva-Tapini*, I. 6-10.

crest, with two arms, with rings dangling from his ears, with a garland set with rubies (round his neck), the intrepid warrior, wielding the bow in his hand, with a charming face full of grace, the mighty conqueror with his eight ministers, *Dhrishti* and others, adorning his side, carrying *Prakrti*, the mother of the world, in the form of the great Goddess, Queen Sita, conspicuously seated on his lap, embraced with both hands by Sita, the *Chit-shakti*, (the power of sentience), shining like burnished gold and decked with all jewels on a lavish scale, nourished by Sita-lakshmi holding the lotus-flower in her hands, the son of Kaushalya, the daughter of the king of the *Koshala*-s; further with Laksmana, his younger brother of a golden complexion standing to his right, with a bow in hand; in that manner alone will the triangle be formed . . . .[65]

. . . The Dhyana is as follows: I worship Laksmana of the two stalwart shoulders, with a beautiful frame of the colour of gold, with eyes resembling lotus flowers, wielding the bow and the arrow and ever intent on giving satisfaction unto Rama, (through devout service).[66]

Shiva too is described often, now austerely, now extravagantly:

. . . (Shiva) that is conjoint with Uma (in the form of the *Ardhanarishvara* . . .) having his three eyes . . . the blue-necked . . . the tranquillized one . . . .[67]

. . . I praise the lord *Dakshinamurtin* that is of the bright white colour of crystal and silver, that holds in his hands the rosary of *Aksha*-beads, strung along with pearls, a pot containing nectar and *Vidya*, and assuming the *Jnanamudra* with the finger-tips of the right hand, with snakes issuing out of his arm-pits and the moon worn as crest-jewel, possessed of three eyes and putting on various kinds of ornaments. . . .[68]

. . . Assuming the *varadamudra* (boon-bestowing posture), vouchsafing well-being and prosperity unto his devotees and holding the axe and the deer (the *mudra* with the right hand and the axe and the deer with two other hands), with one other hand resting on the knee, with the arm-pits encircled by snake-holes, seated under a banyan-tree, with the crescent moon in juxtaposition with his crown of matted hair, enhancing the lustre of his milk-white complexion, possessed of three eyes and surrounded by Suka and other great sages, may that foremost of all gods, *Bhava*, grant purity of conception unto us.[69]

. . . With his entire body rendered white with the smearing of ashes,

[65] *Rama-Tapinyupanishad, Purva-Tapini*, IV. 1-11.
[66] *Rama-Rahasyopanishad*, II. 98-100.
[67] *Dakshinamurtyopanishad*, 6-8.
[68] *Kaivalyopanishad*, 5-7.
[69] *Ibid.*, 9-10.

wearing the crescent moon (as his crest-jewel), having lotus-like hands, shining with the *jnanamudra*, a rosary of *Aksha*-beads, a harp and a book, who is charming to look at, seated on a pedestal in a Yogic posture with a graceful countenance, served by multitudes of great sages while silently expounding the highest truth seated in his preceptorial chair, bespangled with serpents (as his jewels), clad in the hide of an elephant, may that *Ishvara*, the *Paramatman* facing the south, protect us for ever.[70]

... I praise the lord with His abode under the banyan tree, displaying the harp, the book and the rosary of *Aksha*-beads, in his hands, with his neck resembling a cloud in colour, who excels in his power and glory with great serpents issuing out of his arm-pits, and who is worthy of being served by Shuka and other great sages.[71]

... I meditate, for the attainment of all my heart's desires, on the transcendent *Guru* whose hands display the *Chinmudra* (the posture of pure sentience), the book, fire and serpents, whose face beams with grace, who has a beautiful pearl-garland round his neck, who is resplendent with the beams of the crescent-moon shining over his crown, who destroys all ignorance, who is the foremost of all (he being the prime cause of all) who is the import of the foremost words (the Vedas, the most ancient of all lore), the Lord of Bhavani, who has his abode under a banyan-tree with overhanging roots. . . .[72]

... Shiva, who has his residence on the summit of Mount Kailasha, who is of the form of the *Turya*, the import of the *Turyomkara*, the great god Mahadeva who shares his diadem in half with Uma (his spouse), who has the moon, the sun and fire as his (three) eyes, who is possessed of the radiance of an infinite number of moons and suns (simultaneously risen), who is clad in the skin of a tiger, who holds a deer in his hand, who has his body sprinkled all over with sacred ashes and his forehead effulgent with the three parallel transverse lines of the *Tripundra* mark, whose five faces of five different aspects are fully radiant with smiles who is seated in the *Virasana* posture, who is inscrutable, who has neither beginning nor end, who is digitless, who is devoid of attributes, who is calm, who is devoid of attachment, who is non-imperfect (*anamaya*), who drives away by means of his '*Hum*' and '*Phat*' (things apart from himself, even from a far off distance, as they are the brood of the ignorance of the Atman), who is ceaselessly uttering the name of Shiva, who is golden-armed, who is of the form of gold, who is of a golden complexion, who is a hoard of gold, who is without a counterpart, who is the *Turiya* (the fourth), who transcends Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra (the Trinity of Gods), who is the One absolute being that is worthy of all our prayers, the supreme overlord. . . .[73]

[70]*Ibid.*, 11-13. [71]*Ibid.*, 14-15 [72]*Ibid*, 16-19. [73]*Bhasmajabalopanishad*, I. 1.

Seated on *Kusha*-grass, one should, at the time of the three *Sandhyas* (at dawn, noon and sundown) worship the *Shivalinga* and meditate on me alone, that am conjoint with Amba and mounted on the back of a bull, that am possessed of arms of gold, of the colour of gold and of the form of gold, that am the *Purusha* that effects the release of *Pashus* (*Jivas*) from their *Pasha* (bonds of worldly existence), that am of a black and yellow hue, that am of virility ever tending upwards, that am diversely eyed, universal in form (overlapping the universe in its entirety), (the *Virad-atman*) possessed of a thousand eyes, a thousand heads, a thousand feet, hands stretched in all directions around, the *Vishvatman* (embracing the entire universe), the one absolute (Brahman, non-differentiated from the innermost Atman), the non-dual, the digitless (it being non-differentiable into parts), the actionless, the quiescent, the auspicious, the imperishable, the undecaying, the creator of *Hari*, *Hara* and *Hiranyagarbha* (in his capacity as *Ishvara*), the incomprehensible, that has neither beginning, nor end, bathing (the *Shivalinga*) to the accompaniment of the *Rudrasukta* and with *Bhasma* of a white colour and the triple leaves of the *Bilva* tree, fresh or dried. . . .[74]

. . . who am of the form of dirt completely burnt up by the fire of the Brahman, who abides (at the seat aforesaid) embracing the golden-hued Uma (my spouse), who has the lustre resembling crores of moons, who wears the crescent over his crown, who has the Moon, the Sun and fire as his three eyes, whose entire body is ornamented with *Vibhuti*-marks. . . .[75]

Now, the first thing that strikes one about these descriptions is that they are merely fanciful. The descriptions are certainly not reports of sightings: it is not the case that someone saw any of these deities and has described him or her to us. The accounts originate in a process that is familiar to students of alienation: man, unable to grasp or control his environment, endows gods with human powers and qualities to a superhuman degree, and then these powers come to control him as alien powers.[76] For the rest it is quite clear that the gods and goddesses just become occasions for the poet to let his imagination run, occasions for him to smuggle in words that—in a less repressive world-view—he would have used, for instance, to describe a voluptuous, bedecked woman. Consider just a few examples:

> To win plenitude of speech, in my heart I salute the goddess Sarasvati, who shines like snow, pearls, camphor and the moon; who confers auspicious blessing; is decked with garlands of golden *Champaka* blossoms; and charms the mind by her figure with the lofty, rounded bosom.[77]

[74] *Ibid.*, II. 3.
[75] *Ibid.*, II. 26-29.
[76] I will revert to this question in Chapter 7.
[77] *Sarasvatirahasyopanishad*, 5.

Thy neck is as the conch; thy lip
deep red; decked with all ornaments
Art thou, goddess Sarasvati!
Great One! reside on my tongue-tip . . . .[78]

Abiding in the lotus-eyed,
Her home Sri Padmanabha's breast;
Her hands a lotus pair upheld,
And surely of gifts and fear dissolved.
Shining like burnished gold
Bathed in waters held in jars
By trunks of elephant pairs agleam
Like white and spotless clouds;
Her crown with clustered gems bedecked
In silk exceedingly pure enrobed
With sweet unguents anointed
May She our welfare promote . . .![79]

Sri Lakshmi, the giver of boons, the spouse of Vishnu, the donor of wealth, of golden form, is decked with a garland of gold, and a chaplet of silver. She has the sheen of gold, is in a fortress of gold, and dwells in the lotus. She holds a lotus in her hand and loves the lotus. The pearl adorns her. She is the moon-goddess and the sun-goddess, is fond of *bilva* leaves and is mighty. She is enjoyment, release, prosperity, increase, true increase, the ploughing (and the) development. She is the giver of wealth and the mistress of wealth. She is faith, rich in enjoyments, the giver of enjoyments, the upholder, the ordainer . . . .[80]

. . . One should meditate on Sita of the golden complexion with the lotus flower in her right hand, intent always on casting her glances at Rama, seated on the lap of Rama, in the middle of the *Sat-kona-chakra*. . . .[81]

Or consider the following attempt of the poet to indulge his fancy of vicariously satisfying the women who in his imagination approach him:

On seeing Sri Ramachandra of the character of the noumenal existence, absolute sentience, and unsurpassed bliss, (he being the incarnation of) Sri Mahavishnu, with all his limbs of matchless beauty, the sages that dwell in the forest were filled with great marvel. They spoke unto him thus: 'How irreproachably perfect (is thine form), (O Lord). No other form but that of the peerless Brahman can stand a comparison with thine. All the *Avatara*-s of thine, (we verily deem as glorious, as leading ignorant folk like us unto the attainment of the glorious state of the Brahman).

[78] *Ibid.*, 39.
[79] *Saubhagyalakshmyupanishad*, 1-8.
[80] *Ibid.*, I. 11.
[81] *Rama-Rahsyopanishad*, II. 94-7.

(Even the gods, from Brahman downwards), hold in high esteem (thy *Avatara-s*, commencing from the *Matsya*). We shall presently embrace thee (that art the prop of the phenomenal world, both in its individual and collective aspects and that remainest as the sole residuum, after the negation of the false perceptions of the body and the like as the Atman, due to ignorance and its concomitants).' Thereupon Ramachandra said unto them: 'Even if you should assume the form of females through your power of Yoga, I cannot gratify your desire during this incarnation of mine (because of my vow of being wedded to a single wife). In another cycle of the world's life, when I incarnate as Krishna, do you embrace me as cow-herdesses.' Listening to the words of the Lord and being filled with joy, they said: 'O Lord! when thou incarnate as Krishna, there will be other incarnations, (forming thy *Amsha*-s. [subdivisions] such as *Bala-bhadra* and other cow-herds, [assuming the form of males]); then do thou make us incarnate as females (not possessed of control over ourselves). (At that time, in order that thy body might ever come into contact with ours, O Lord!) a body well adapted for *Rasa-krida* (sportive dances with cow-herdesses) should be assumed mutually (by thee, the omnipotent *Ishvara* and also) by us, so that the bodies of all of us (that are intent on attaining thy real state) might frequently touch thine: let us assume suitable incarnations.' On hearing these words of Rudra and other gods (and celestial sages), the Lord himself replied thus: 'I shall verily embrace you all. I shall readily accede to your request.'[82]

Are these and similar passages to be taken as any more than self-indulgences of the poets? In this respect, are the poets any more than the lineal ancestors of our contemporary commercial artists who today churn out our polychrome calendars with their voluptuous goddesses?

The second factor that dissipates the significance that these sectarian descriptions might have had is that there is nothing sacrosanct about the list of deities. The pantheon grows and grows. First Vishnu is to be adored; soon enough his *savari*, Garuda, too, is to be adored; next the *Garudopanishad*, which forms a part of the *Atharva-veda*, equates him with Brahman. First, Rama is to be worshipped; then Rama and Sita; then Rama and Sita and Lakshmana too. Soon enough Rama's bow and arrows enter the pantheon:

> . . . First is the worship of the investiture with *Anga*-s. The practitioner should worship Rama in the middle of the *Yantra*, Sita on the left side, and at the front, the bow and arrow of Rama. At the roots of the eight petals (of the inner eight-petalled lotus), he should worship the second investiture, *Dhrishti* and others, (at the tips of these petals), then the fourth, consisting of Indra and others, and lastly the fifth, consisting of *Vajra* and others. With this preliminary worship of the *Yantra*, he should utter as *Ja*[illegible]-syllabled and other *Mantra*-s.[83]

[83] *Rama-Rahasyopanishad*, III. 5.

The third fact to bear in mind is that the Upanishads themselves tell us that these *saguna* descriptions of the sectarian as well as the other Upanishads are not important. They are mere aids, we are told again and again, by which minds of the less proficient are to be directed to the *nirguna*, undifferentiated Brahman, the pure consciousness.

Again and again the Upanishads indicate how one must progress from *saguna* worship to meditation of the *nirguna* void. The lengthy sequence in *Nrisimha-Tapinyupanishad, Uttara-Tapini*, III. 9,10 is just one typical instance. For reasons of space it is not being reproduced. The reader will find it worth his while to read the passage in the original. Here is a compact statement of the rationale:

> Attribution of form to the Brahman, that is absolute sentience, that is peerless, that is digitless and that is devoid of embodiment, is verily for the benefit of practitioners. In the case of (embodied) deities with forms attributed to them, there is likewise description of (sexes) male and female, limbs, weapons and the like, (all for enabling the practitioner to worship Rama, the non-differentiated *Paramatman*, more easily). To these deities numbering two, (Sita and Rama), four (Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughna), six (Bharata, Shatrughna, Lakshmana, Sugriva, Hanuman and Vibhishana), eight (Dhrati and other ministers) are ascribed by ignorant folk ten, twelve, sixteen, eighteen and other numbers of fore-arms. To some deities are ascribed retinue of followers reckoned in *shankha* and other units (a *shankha* is a hundred-thousand-crores), such units being of a number ending in thousands. Similarly, to these deities are ascribed specific colours and specific vehicles, specific powers and countless armies. Thus, in the Brahman that is verily Rama, there has been the fivefold ascription (of various deities, then of colours, of vehicles, of weapons for achieving various purposes, and lastly of countless armies). This ascription of armies and the like (unto the *Paramatman* that is verily bodiless and changeless) is due to the body, ascribed to him, for the benefit of the multitude of devotees of his, that they might attain his state easily thereby.[84]

And here is a typical affirmation that meditating on the *nirguna* entity is superior to meditating on the *saguna*, differentiated form:

> He who meditates on the one-toothed god, having four arms, wielding the cord and the goad with two of them, manifesting with the two others the *Abhaya* (fear-not) posture and the *Varada* (boon-bestowing) posture, having the musk-rat as the emblem on his ensign, with a red protuberant belly, and ears resembling winnowing baskets, putting on a red garment, with his limbs smeared with red sandal paste, worshipped with floral tributes of red flowers ever mercifully disposed towards his devotees, who

[84] *Rama-Tapinyupanishad, Purva-Tapini*, I. 7-10.

is the prime cause of the phenomenal world, never swerving from his self-chosen right track, who came into being at the beginning of the creation to the good fortune of all beings, who stands apart from the influence of the *Purusha* (*Ishvara*) and the *Prakrti* (*Maya*), transcending all in this manner, that *Yogin*, meditating on the non-differentiated Ganapati, is superior to and excels *Yogins* who merely meditate on the differentiated Ganapati.[85]

For all these reasons I believe that the imaginative accounts of deities in the sectarian Upanishads are not to be taken seriously.

The next major consideration that tells us that the references to these separate deities do not affect the world-view of the sectarian Upanishads is that *the sectarian Upanishads themselves refer to their deities interchangeably*.

So that no doubt remains on this score I will list for the reader a few examples of passages in which this feature is too obvious to be missed.

Two passages in *Tripura-tapinyupanishad*—an Upanishad of the Shaktas—are typical: in the first we learn that Vishnu pervades all, in the second that the Goddess pervades all:

> Vishnu faces all quarters. As oil surrounds and fills a ball of sesamum, He pervades (all things). His supreme abode is the high sky. The wise, namely, gods like Brahma, behold it, i.e., hold it for ever in the heart. Hence, Vishnu's own form is derived from His abiding, existing, in all beings. He is Vasudeva (the god who dwells in all).[86]

> . . . The Goddess pervades all things. Obeisance, obeisance, unto Her![87]

Glance now at three representative passages from the Vaishnav Upanishads in which the names of different deities are all used interchangeably:

> Then, the eternal one is Narayana, (he being the prime cause of all). Brahma, (the four-faced creator), is Narayana. Shiva is likewise Narayana. Shakra (the king of the celestials), is also Narayana. (So also are all animate orders of creation). Time is Narayana. The cardinal

[85] *Ganapatyupanishad*, II-14. One need hardly stress that on this point the position of the non-sectarian Upanishads is identical. One repeatedly comes across passages such as the following: "Those, who go in for the worship of another god, after giving up the *Ishvara* firmly established in the recess of the heart, verily cultivate a desire for a mere gem, after giving up the *Kaustubha*, (the brightest gem worn by the great Vishnu), that is in their hands. . . ." *Mahopanishad*, VI. 20.

"While there is Shiva firmly established in the body, the fool looks always for Shiva in the *Tirtha*, gift, *Japa*, sacrifice, wood and stone images. He who serves what is without, giving up me and stand in his interior, is like one who will lick his own elbow, throwing off the bolus of food in his hands. The *Yogins* look for Shiva within themselves and not in images. Images have been created for helping ignorant people to conceive of the Supreme Being." *Darshanopanishad*, IV, 57-9.

[86] *Tripura-tapinyupanishad*, IV. 14.

[87] *Ibid.*, IV. 21.

points are Narayana. The intermediate points of the compass are Narayana. The upward direction is Narayana. The downward direction is Narayana. The interior and the exterior are Narayana. (So a'so are all the inanimate orders of creation, commencing from the *A-vyakta.* All this, that has been and has yet to be, is Narayana alone. (Apart from Narayana, there is not even a speck). Spotless, smearless, misconceptionless indescribable, pure, radiant, Narayana is one alone. There is no counterpart whatsoever (of him). He, who knows thus, becomes Vishnu alone. He becomes Vishnu alone. This is the sum and substance of the crest of the *Yajur-veda.*[88]

When thus spoken to by *Vayu-putra* (Hanuman), the great *Yogin*-s, seers and devotees of the Lord Vishnu, asked Hanuman further thus: 'Pray, do thou relate unto us (what are) the limbs of Rama.' Hanuman replied unto them thus: 'Do ye then worship as the *Anga*-s (limbs) of Sri Rama . . . the following deities, *Vayu putra*, Vighnesa, Vani, Durga, Kshetrapalaka, Surya, Chandra, Narayana, Nara-simha, Vayudeva, Varaha and their characteristic *Mantra*-s, Sita, Lakshmana, Shatrughna, Bharata, Vibhishana, Sugriva, Angada, Jambavan, and the *Pranava* . . . . Without recourse to these limbs (as preliminary step, and reciting their *Mantra-s*), Sri Rama (and the uttering of his *Mantra*) would be a hindrance to the votary in achieving his purpose.[89]

. . . One should know (that Nrisimha, devoid of attributes, the non-determinate Brahman), who alone is Brahma, (the creator), who is Shiva, (the destroyer), who is Hari, (the sustainer), who is Indra, (the lord of the three worlds), who alone is the imperishable, the highest *Svaraj*, (the self-luminous, that shines with his own radiance, unlike the *Vishva*, the *Taijasa* and the *Prajna*), as the fourth quarter, (the *Turya-turiya*).[90]

The Shaivite Upanishads use the designations with equal catholicity:

On hearing those words of his (Shuka's), the father replied unto Shuka thus: 'Rudra is of the character of the god of all gods. All the gods are of the character of Rudra. To the right side of Rudra stand established the Sun, Brahma (the creator) and the three fires (*Dakshina, Garhapatya* and *Ahavaniya*). To his left stand established the three, viz., the Goddess Uma, Vishnu and the Moon. The goddess that is Uma is herself actually Vishnu. The god that is Vishnu is verily the Moon.[91]

I am the Isha. I am Hiranmaya. I am the form of Shiva. . . .[92]

He (the sage that has attained Brahman), is the (four-faced) Brahma;

[88] *Narayanopanishad*, II.
[89] *Rama-Rahasyopanishad*, I- 7, 8.
[90] *Nrisimha-Topinyupanishad, Purva-Tapini*, I. 8.

he is Shiva; he is Indra; he is the imperishable (*Kutastha*); he is the supreme being that is manifest in its own glory; he alone is Vishnu (the all-pervading Hari); he is the *Prana*; he is *Kala* (the consummator of all things, or Yama, the god of death); he is fire; and he is the moon. In short, he alone is all, whatever has been, whatever is yet to be, and what is ancient . . . .[93]

(O, Ganapati). . . thou alone art the exclusive creator through being of the character of the all-pervasive Vishnu; thou alone art the exclusive upholder by being the prop of all; thou alone art the exclusive destroyer of all in thy character as Rudra; thou alone art the very Brahman, that is ultimately all this phenomenal world that is manifest verily as the Brahman alone; thou alone art the Atmān directly manifest of the form of the innermost Atman of all beings. Thee alone I always speak of as *Rita* or the moral rectitude which is the mainstay of everyday life. Thee alone I speak of as *Satya* or the real (absolute) existence. . . .[94]

O Ganapati. . . . This phenomenal world in its entirety derives its sustenance from Thee alone of the character of the all-pervasive Vishnu. This phenomenal world in its entirety will attain its dissolution with form in Thee alone of the character of Rudra. . . .This phenomenal world in its entirety attains its dissolution (shorn of its form, in all reality) in Thee alone, the formless Brahman. . . . Thou art of the character of the three Shaktis, viz., the powers of sentient action, knowledge and desire. *Yogin*-s ever contemplate on Thee alone in the attitude, 'I am the Brahman.' Thou art Brahma, the creator. Thou art Vishnu, the sustainer. Thou art Rudra, the destroyer. Thou art Indra. Thou art *Agni* (fire). Thou art *Vayu* (air) and other guardians of the cardinal points. Thou art the Sun (the eye of the Universe). Thou art the Moon (the lord of the herbs, the feeder of the Universe). Thou art the Brahman (vastly expanding everywhere). Thou art the *Bhur*, the *Bhuvar* and the *Suvarlokas*, as well as the *Omkara*, and hence comprehend all as the all-Atman. . . .[95]

Needless to say the non-sectarian Upanishads make even less ado about the differences between one deity and another.[96]

In support of the view that the sectarian Upanishads are suffused with the same conception of reality as the other Upanishads, I have thus far noted one principal argument and two subsidiary ones. The principal argument was that the principal concepts around which the world-view presented in Chapter 3 was organized are affirmed again and again in the sectarian Upanishads also. To illustrate this point I drew the reader's attention to

[93] *Ibid.*, 8-10. [94] *Ganapatyupanishad*, 1-3. [95] *Ibid.* 5-5.

[96] For a start the reader may glance at the following passages: *Brahmavidyopanishad*, II-III. *Mandalabrahmopanishad*, I. 4. 1, 2; *Varahopanishad*, II. 62, 63; *Anna-Purna-upanishad*, III. 18-24; *Mahopanishad*, IV. 76-82; *Skandopanishad*, 8, 9.

affirmations about Brahman being undifferentiated, unqualified, autonomous, pure consciousness; about the identity of Atman and Brahman; and about the proposition that Brahman, the pure consciousness, alone exists and about its corollary that all else is false.

To fortify this evidence I have thus far presented evidence about two subsidiary arguments. The first was that the accounts of the central concept —Brahman—in the sectarian Upanishads are not different from the accounts given in other Upanishads. The second argument concerned the numerous fanciful accounts that the sectarian Upanishads contain of the sectarian deities. I have argued thus far that we should not take these descriptions as affecting the world-view for two reasons. First, the descriptions are mere figments of poetic fancy as shown by their concocted nature, by the fact that there is not even an agreed list of who is what in the pantheon and by the fact that the sectarian Upanishads themselves tell us that the *saguna* descriptions are mere aids, aids to help direct our minds to the *nirguna* Brahman. The second reason I gave was that while talking of the particular deities the sectarian Upanishads themselves refer to them interchangeably.

It is time now to present evidence about the third reason on account of which we should not take the accounts of sectarian deities as affecting the basic view of reality.

This reason is as follows: the sectarian Upanishads often push their particular deity, their particular ritual and advertise its potency *vis-a-vis* that of other deities and other rituals; but when the sectarian Upanishads are taken as a whole, it is obvious that the competition among the enthusiasts soon cancels rival claims, that far from affecting the basic philosophical position, the rival claims turn out to be no more than the anxious pleadings of anxious retailers, each pushing his brand as the only reliable one when, in fact, they are all retailing the same product.

Here is the *Sharabhopanishad*, dear to the Shaivites, claiming that Vishnu is a devotee of Shiva:

> The Lord Shankara, the foremost of all the gods, the pair of whose lotus-like feet forms even now the asylum sought after by Vishnu, afforded protection unto all his subjects. Having praised the great Ishana that is worthy of all praise, that transcends the range of speech and the intellect, Indra and the other gods obtained the blessings of Ishana through the potency of their prayer. Then Vishnu also, after making salutation unto him and praising him in various ways, remained with his hands clasped in prayer. Pleased with the devotion of Vishnu whose body was bent low in the posture of veneration, the Lord blessed him as well. . . .[97]

And here are the counter-claims of the Vaishnavites:

[97] *Sharabhopanishad*, 17-19.

I shall presently glorify with exquisite praise that one lord, Govinda, the embodiment of supreme existence, sentience and bliss, the quest of the *Mantra* of five words, having as his place of resort the foot of the *Kalpcka*-tree in the forest of *Brindavana*, (I shall ever sing his praises) along with the troops of the *Marut*-s, Om! salutation unto thee of the form of the *Vishvatman*, that art the cause of the sustenance and dissolution of the Universe, the overlord of the Universe, nay, the *Vishva* (the Universe) itself. Salutation, salutation, unto Govinda. Salutation, unto thee of the form of perfect knowledge, and of the form of transcendent bliss. Unto Krishna, the favourite Lord of the *Go-pi*-s, salutation. . . . Salutation unto Govinda, unto the destroyer of the clan of Kamsa, unto thee, the killer of the demon, Kesin, and the wrestler, Canura, unto thee, that art adored by Shiva . . .[98]

> Sanaka and other sages asked Hanuman thus: 'Pray, do thou relate unto us the true import of the Srirama-*mantra*.' Hanuman replied unto them thus: 'Of all the Rama-*mantra*-s, the six-syllabled one is the king, (it being the *Taraka*). This is of . . . various kinds. The great potency of this six-syllabled one, Shiva knows in all its true import. . . .[99]

While the Shaivites tell us that only Shiva is worthy of meditation

> What transcends the transcendent, imperishable Ishvara that outstrips the perishable phenomenal world is the Brahman; what transcends the transcendent imperishable Ishvara that outstrips the perishable phenomenal world is likewise Hari. For the reason that the Isha is what is transcendent (Vishnu), there is verily none else either to match or to excel him. The One Shiva alone is eternal. All things apart from him are false. Hence to the exclusion of all the gods, such as Vishnu and others, that are worthy of being meditated upon, Shiva alone is par excellence worthy of being meditated upon as the liberator from all the bonds of worldly existence. Unto him, the great consumer, unto that great overlord, salutation. . . .[100]

the Vaishnavites tell us that only those who worship Vishnu can succeed:

> Those who worship him, as seated on his raised seat (in the manner indicated above), are verily men of fortitude. For them alone is the eternal attainment (of the Brahman) possible and not for others. . . . The seeker after liberation should, after giving up all lines of conduct (laid down by the *Shastra* for his guidance in worldly existence), seek as his sole asylum, that radiant lord manifesting himself as the *Paramatman* non-differentiated from the innermost Atman, shedding his lustre over the minds of all

[98] *Gopala-Tapinyupanishad, Gopala-Purva-Tapini*, V. 33-45.
[99] *Rama-Rahasyopanishad*, V. 1-4.
[100] *Sharabhopanishad*, 31-34

> beings, that Krishna, who, of yore (at the time of the creation), set Brahma about the task (of creating the phenomenal world), who imparted unto him (Brahman), the Vedas and again afforded protection unto the self-same Vedas from being lost in the ocean of the Great Deluge, (by taking the *Matsya* and other incarnations). . . .[101]

In one case we are told that the real deity is Sadashiva who assumes the guises of Vishnu etc.,

> Now, in this sphere (of nescience), the Lord (Sadashiva) assuming the guises of Prajapati, Vishnu and Rudra, comes to be styled Goddess Tripura. . . .[102]

in another that Krishna is supreme,

> Krishna verily is the supreme God. Death is verily afraid of Govinda. . . .[103]

Even among the Upanishads assigned to one sect, say the Vaishnava sect, each Upanishad is peddling its particular brand. The *Garudopanishad* presents Garuda as Brahman while the *Krishnopanishad* insists that it is Krishna who is Brahman. The same special pleading goes for one formula against another, one ritual against another.

The *Tripad-Vibhuti-Maha-Narayanopanishad* insists that

> Those, who exclusively worship Vishnu, in the attitude, 'I am (the Paramatman), Vishnu alone,' verily cross over, (overcome), the great illusion. At no time whatever have others found it possible to cross over that (great illusion), by resorting to all or any of the various devices known to human ingenuity. . . .[104]

while other Vaishnava Upanishads assign the same efficacy to other devices.

> In this connection occur the following verses. Among the various *Mantra-s*, recognized by the several cults, such as, the *Ganapatya-s*, the *Shaiva-s*, the *Shakta s*, the *Saura-s*, and even the Vaisnava-s (as capable of bestowing one's heart's desires), the *Mantra* (of six syllables) in praise of Rama, which yields all that is desired, is known as productive of fruit in a larger measure than others. Among the Mantra-s of the various cults, such as the Ganapatya and others, this six syllables *Mantra* is possessed of properties which are crores over crores of times more potent than the

[101] *Gopala-Tapinyupanishad, Gopala-Purva-Tapini*, II. 17-24.
[102] *Tripuratapinyupanishad*, I. 1.
[103] *Gopala-Tapinyupanishad*, I. 2, *et. passim.*
[104] *Tripad-Vibhuti-Maha-Narayanopanishad*, I.IV. 13.

rest and at the same time yields fruit with the least effort on the part of the practitioner. This six-syllabled *Mantra*, which removes the multitudes of all sins and is the best among the best of all *Mantra-s*, is known as the King of all *Mantra-s*. The votary that does not know this (hymn of six syllables), what will he do with hymns in general apart from this?. . .[105]

What purpose is achieved, through the vain effort with various formulas, which are productive of transient fruits, and that too rendered possible only after exhaustive effort, which are absolutely fruitless, but for the little scope they afford for rousing one's cupidity and which carry with them all the misery of worldly existence? This eight-syllabled formula, '*Sri-Ramah Sharanam Mama*,' ever prevails, even though one alone, bestowing the fruits of all the *Mantra-s* together and completely bereft of defects, such as rousing one's cupidity and the like. . . .[106]

Of all the Rama-*mantras* the six-syllabled one is the King. . . .[107]

The Sacred Texts, '*Tat Tvam Asi*,' (that thou art), and others, bestow liberation, while this Rama-*mantra* is capable of bestowing liberation as well as the gratification of desires. Hence, this (Rama-*mantra*) by far excels the other (the *Maha-vakya-s*), in point of potency. . . .[108]

Those who mutter the *Mantra* of Govinda, which consists of five words, duly interspersing them with the *Om-kara*, unto them will this (Govinda) reveal his real form. Hence should the seeker practise (this *Mantra*) for attaining eternal peace. It is only from this five-worded *Mantra* in praise of Govinda, that all other *Mantra*-s have taken their origin, for the well-being of mankind, *Mantra*-s, such as the ten-syllabled one and others, (that came to be revealed to Sanaka, Sanandana, and other seers) and are practised in the prescribed manner by Samkrandana (Indra), and other gods desirous of enhancing their powers (ultimately leading to the attainment of the state of the *Paramatman*, Krishna). . . .[109]

The *Yogin*-ascetic (always aiming at what lies higher and higher), attains the highest state, by adopting the four upward tending courses, viz., with his staff pointing upwards (in the direction of the *Vishva* and thence onward upto the *Avikalpa*), with his semen tending in the upward direction (through confirmed celibacy), with the *Urdhva-pundra* (pointing upwards and placed over the prescribed places), and by practising the upward Yogic path. Knowledge based on this firm conviction is attained of its own accord (by the *Yogin*) through real devotion unto me. By making the *Gopi-chandana*-mark every day in the prescribed manner, the one-

[105] *Rama-Tapiny Upanishad, Uttara-Tapini*, V. 6-34.
[106] *Rama-Rahasyopanishad*, II. 25-40. [107] *Ibid.*, V. 1-4. [108] *Ibid.*, V. 15-17.
[109] *Gopala-Tapinyupanishad, Gopala-Purva-Tapini*, II. 17-24

pointed devotion unto me will be developed thoroughly (by him). What is said therein is undoubtedly the truth. The (wearing of the) *Urdhva-pundra* (perpendicular mark), with *Gopi-chandana* mixed with water, has been prescribed as a course beyond which there is nothing better for all Brahmana-s pursuing the course of life prescribed by the Veda-s. . . .[110]

It would be disingenuous to argue that partisan pleading of this kind alters the underlying world-view. In all probability the passages merely record the devices which priests and other official ideologists found handy in drilling the world-view into the heads of the laity. The only charitable interpretation that can be put on them is that they record the experience of some experimenters who found these devices to be useful aids for reining in the mind, for focussing it, for stilling it and, ultimately, for dissolving the mind. No further significance—in particular, no philosophical significance—can be attached to the special pleadings of individual Upanishads for their sectarian deities or their particular *Kriyas, mantras* and *yantras.*

THE JOURNEY BACK

While I can go on adducing additional evidence for the position taken in this chapter, I shall now proceed on the assumption that what has been said above has been enough to convince the reader that the basic conception of reality, even in the sectarian Upanishads, is of an undifferentiated non-corporeality, of pure consciousness; in other words, of a pure abstraction.

The Upanishads insist that this abstraction has flashed to them as a revelation, that it represents the great Truth, the secret knowledge. Modern panegyrists insist not just that this is revelation but in addition that it came to the Hindu seers alone.

Even a passing acquaintance with other traditions is sufficient to remind us that the process of arriving at this rarified abstraction is neither unique nor revelatory.

It is not the case that someone got a glimpse of the undifferentiated Brahman and then saw the Brahman progressively differentiating Himself into objects which were not really objects—in the sense of being objects that existed separately from Brahman. It seems to me that the process was quite the reverse and it was, for most of its journey, a purely *intellectual* process becoming at the penultimate stage mere self-hypnosis.

To reconstruct the process we must transport ourselves back to those times and visualize the state of the people. Much of what was happening around them was only dimly perceived; given the stage of empirical knowledge, most of it could not be explained, it could not be accounted for. This led to the creation of gods who, as we saw, were endowed with human powers to a superhuman extent and could then be said to "cause" empirical phenomena. At the next step, more rarified abstractions were evolved

[110] *Vasudevopanishad,* 19-25.

from these gods till reductionism yielded the undifferentiated Absolute. What had begun as a quest to explain what was happening around one ended by explaining away what was happening.

To recount the sequence and also to emphasize that the sequence is not a unique revelation to our Upanishadic seers, I shall quote a long passage from a famous polemic of Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*. The passage recounts the steps by which the Hegelians regressed to the undifferentiated "Idea" and then "explained" things and phenomena as the actualization, the self-realization of the "Idea."

> If from real apples, pears, strawberries and almonds I form the general idea 'Fruit,' if I go further and imagine that my abstract idea 'Fruit,' derived from real fruit, is an entity existing outside me, is indeed the true essence of the pear, the apple, etc., then—in the language of speculative philosophy—I am declaring that 'Fruit' is the 'Substance' of the pear, the apple, the almond, etc. I am saying, therefore, that to be a pear is not essential to the pear, that to be an apple is not essential to the apple; that *what is essential to these things is not their real existence, perceptible to the senses, but the essence that I have abstracted from them* and then foisted on them, the essence of my idea—'Fruit.' I therefore declare apples, pears, almonds, etc., to be mere forms of existence, modes, of 'Fruit.' My finite understanding supported by my senses does of course distinguish an apple from a pear and a pear from an almond, but my speculative reason declares these sensuous differences inessential and irrelevant. It sees in the apple the same as in the pear, and in the pear the same as in the almond, namely 'Fruit.' Particular real fruits are no more than semblances whose true essence is 'the Substance' —'Fruit'. . . .Having reduced the different real fruits to the one 'Fruit' of abstraction—'the Fruit'—speculation must, in order to attain some semblance of real content, try somehow to find its way back from 'the Fruit,' from the 'Substance' to the diverse, ordinary real fruits, the pear, the apple, the almond, etc. It is as hard to produce real fruits from the abstract idea 'the Fruit' as it is easy to produce this abstract idea from real fruits. Indeed, it is impossible to arrive at the opposite of an abstraction without relinquishing the abstraction.
>
> The speculative philosopher therefore relinquishes the abstraction 'the Fruit,' but in a speculative, mystical fashion—with the appearance of not relinquishing it. Thus it is really only in appearance that he rises above his abstraction. He argues somewhat as follows:
>
> If apples, pears, almonds and strawberries are really nothing but 'the Substance,' 'the Fruit,' the question arises: Why does 'the Fruit' manifest itself to me sometimes as an apple, sometimes as a pear, sometimes as an almond? Why this semblance of diversity which so obviously contradicts my speculative conception of Unity, 'the Substance,' 'the Fruit?'
>
> This, answers the speculative philosopher, is because 'the Fruit' is not dead, undifferentiated, motionless, but a living, self-differentiating,

moving essence. The diversity of the ordinary fruits is significant not only for my sensuous understanding, but also for 'the Fruit' itself and for speculative reason. The different ordinary fruits *are different manifestations of the life of the 'one Fruits'*; they are crystallizations of 'the Fruit' itself. Thus in the apple 'the Fruit' gives itself an apple-like existence, in the pear, a pear-like existence. We must, therefore, no longer say, as one might from the standpoint of 'the Substance': a pear is 'the Fruit,' an apple is 'the Fruit,' an almond is 'the Fruit,' but rather 'the Fruit' presents itself as a pear, 'the Fruit' presents itself as an apple, 'the Fruit' presents itself as an almond; and the differences which distinguish apples, pears and almonds from one another *are the self-differentiations of 'the Fruit'* and make the particular fruits different members of the life-process of 'the Fruit.' Thus 'the Fruit' is no longer an empty undifferentiated unity; it is oneness as allness, as 'totality' of fruits, which constitute an 'organically linked series of members.' In every member of that series 'the Fruit' gives itself a more developed, more explicit existence, until, finally, as the 'summary' of all fruits, it is at the same time the living unity which contains all those fruits dissolved in itself just as it produces them from within itself. . . . The main interest for the speculative philosopher is therefore to produce the existence of the real ordinary fruits and to say in some mysterious way that there are apples, pears, almonds and raisins. But the apples, pears, almonds and raisins that we rediscover in the speculative world are nothing but *semblances* of apples, *semblances* of pears, *semblances* of almonds and *semblances* of raisins, for they are moments in the life of 'the Fruit,' this abstract creation of the mind, and therefore themselves abstract creations of the mind. Hence what is delightful in this speculation is to *rediscover all the real fruits there, but as fruits which have a higher mystical significance*, which have grown out of the ether of your brain and not out of material earth, which are incarnations of 'the Fruit,' of the Absolute Subject. When you return from the abstraction, the supernatural creation of the mind, 'the Fruit,' to real natural fruits, you give on the contrary the natural fruits a supernatural significance and transform them into sheer abstractions. Your main interest is then to point out the unity of 'the Fruit' in all the manifestations of its life—the apple, the pear, the almond—that is, to show the mystical interconnection between these fruits, how in each one of them 'the Fruit' *realizes itself* by degrees and necessarily progresses, for instance, from its existence as a raisin to its existence as an almond. *Hence the value of the ordinary fruits no longer consists in their natural qualities, but in their speculative quality*, which gives each of them a definite place in the life-process of 'the Absolute Fruit'. . . .[111]

[111]K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Holy Family*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975, II. 68-70. (emphasis added).

Thus we first arrive at the farthest abstraction we can reach, the Absolute. The empirical world then becomes a mere manifestation of the Absolute. But there is an important proviso—the difference between the world, the manifestation, and the Absolute is now only an *apparent* difference. The Absolute distinguishes nothing real from Itself. The empirical world is only a metaphysical distinction, a phantom of Its ethereal "brain," an imaginary product of the latter's "desire for another." In our perceiving the Truth about ourselves and about everything as Atman and about the Atman as Brahman, the Absolute, the pure consciousness, does away again with the appearance of diversity, the Absolute recognizes that it has produced no real object—i.e., no object which in reality is distinct from It.[112]

The pure abstraction is now identified with other pure abstractions. Any number of such abstractions are produced from the seer's tuft. The only characteristic that is necessary for an abstraction to be equated with Brahman, it would seem, is that the abstraction must have no meaning of its own—it must be an empty box, so that it can be filled with such meaning as we want to stuff into it.

The most frequent extension of Brahman as pure consciousness is to endow Him with not just *Chit* but with *Sat* and *Ananda* also. What was pure consciousness now becomes Being, Consciousness and Bliss. While this and similar extensions are often made, a little reflection will show that the new words do not add, they *cannot* add, anything to the basic concept of the undifferentiated reality as pure consciousness.

Thus, for instance, again and again the Upanishads refer to the Brahman as, among other things, "Bliss."[113] But what is this "Bliss?" It is none other than the indescribable experience that comes upon our dissolving into that very pure consciousness!

In view of the overriding insistence of the Upanishads on the fact that reality is noncorporeal, undifferentiated, aspectless, we are repeatedly led to conclude that even when more than one word is used—for instance, the words *Sat*, *Chit* and *Ananda* instead of just *Chit*—the words, as we shall see in Chapters 8 and 9, must all mean the same thing.

Among other abstractions the favourite, of course, is "*Om*." Again and again it is used not just as a synonym for Brahman, it is said to be the Brahman Himself.

> Prajapati brooded upon the worlds. From them, when they had been brooded upon, issued forth the threefold knowledge. He brooded upon this. From it, when it had been brooded upon, issued forth these syllables: *bhur*, *bhuvah*, *svar*.
>
> He brooded upon them. From them, when they had been brooded

[112]Compare *Ibid.*, pp. 165-66.

[113]For instance, *Taittiriyopanishad*, 2.7.1, 2.8.1, 2.8 5, 2.9.1, 3.6; *Brahma-Sutras*, 1.12-14.

upon, issued forth the syllable *Om*. As all leaves are held together by a spike, so all speech is held together by *Om*. Verily, *Om* is the world-all. Verily *Om* is this world-all. . . .[114]

Om is Brahman.
Om is the whole world.
Om—that is compliance. As also, verily, it is well known—upon the words 'O', Call forth, they call forth.
With '*Om*' they sing the Saman chants.
With '*Om*' Som they recite the Invocations of Praise
With '*Om*' the *Adhvaryu* priest utters the Response.
With '*Om*' the Brahmin priest utters the Introductory Eulogy
With '*Om*' one assents to the *Agni*-oblation (*agnihotra*).
'*Om*,' says a Brahmin about to recite, 'may I get the sacred word (Brahma).' He does get the sacred word. . . .[115]

The word which all the Vedas rehearse, And which all austerities proclaim,
Desiring which men live the life of religious studentship
That word to thee I briefly declare
That is *Om*!
That syllable, truly, indeed, is Brahman!
That syllable indeed is the supreme!
Knowing that syllable, truly, indeed,
Whatever one desires is his!
That is the best support.
That is the supreme support.
Knowing that support.
One becomes happy in the Brahma-world. . . .[116]

Then Saibya Satyakama asked him (i.e. Pippalada): 'Verily, sir, if some one among men here should meditate on the syllable *Om* until the end of his life, which world, verily, does he win thereby?' To him then he said: 'Verily, O Satyakama, that which is the syllable *Om* is both the higher and the lower Brahman. Therefore, with this support in truth a knower reaches one or the other. . . .The three elements are deadly when employed one after the other, (a,u,m) separately in actions external, internal, or intermediate. When they are properly employed, the knower trembles not. With the *Rig* verses, to this world; with the *Saman* chants, to the intermediate space; with the *Yajus* formulas, to that which sages recognize; with the syllable *Om* in truth as a support, the knower reaches That which is peaceful, unaging, immortal, fearless, and supreme!'[117]

[114]*Chandogyopanishad*, II. 23.2, 3.
[115]*Taittiriyopanishad*, I. 8.
[116]*Kathopanishad*, II. 15-17.
[117]*Prashnopanishad*, V. 1-7.

Om—This syllable is this whole world.
It's further explanation is:
The past, the present, the future—everything is just the word *Om*.
And whatever else that transcends threefold time—that, too, is just the word *Om*.
For truly, everything here is Brahman; this self (atman) is Brahman, This same self has four fourths. . . .[118]

Om is the monosyllabic *mantra* non-differentiated from the Brahman. . . .[119]

All that answers to the description of the *Vishva*, the *Prajna* and the like is the *Omkara* alone, as the word and its import are identical and there is no difference as such, perceived by the mind.[120]

The Brahman, which is non-differentiated from the innermost bliss, the *Purusha*, is the real form of the *Pranava* (*Om*). . . .[121]

Om is the Brahman in one syllable. . . .[122]

Om, the monosyllable, is the Brahman. This is what has been said by the expounders of Vedanta. . . .[123]

This syllable. . .is the *Para Brahman*, which forms its import; 'The *Omkara* is the *Para* as well as the *Apara Brahman*,' as the *Shruti* says. . . .[124]

The Brahman, which is verily non-differentiated from the innermost bliss and which is abundantly full, is of the real form of the *Pranava*, which is no other than the *Turya-turiya*). (The *Pranava*) is made up of the letters 'A,' 'U' and 'M'. . . . This *Om*, which is attained by bringing them together, is a synonym for that, (the Brahman). . . .[125]

This syllable, *Om*, this is verily all. . . .[126]

This (*Pranava*), the monosyllable *Om*!, is verily all this, that we see around us, comprised in the phenomenal world of names and forms, which is identical with Brahman alone. Of this, that has been thus explained, a supplementary explanation is as follows: The past, the present, and the future, (all that has been, all that is present, and all that shall be), all this is the *Omkara* alone. Whatever else is reputed to be other than these, transcending the three durations, even that is the *Omkara* alone. All this is the Brahman. . . .[127]

[118] *Mandukyopanishad*, 1, 2.
[119] *Akshy-Upanishad*, II. 42-48.
[120] *Amrita-Nadopanishad*, 20.
[121] *Atharvashikhopanishad*, I. 2.
[122] *Nrisimha-Tapinyupanishad*, *Purva-Tapini*, II. 5.
[123] *Suryopanishad*, 7.
[124] *Atma-Bodhopanishad*, I. 1.
[125] *Brahmavidyopanishad*. 1-3.
[126] *Narayanopanishad*, IV.
[127] *Ibid.*, *Purva-Tapini*, IV. 3.

One should establish the identity of this Atman of the four quarters, so differentiated on account of the ignorance of its true nature, with the *Omkara* of the four *Mantras* with the help of the *Shastra*-s and *Buddhi*. . . .[128]

This *Nrisimha*, identical with the *Omkara*, is the *Turya* manifesting itself. . . .[129]

This Atman is verily the one essence of authority and is palpable supreme sentience alone, for the reason that before the beginning of all things (long before they came to be), at the present time and in the future as well, it has been, is and will ever be perfectly manifest; on that account it is palpable sentience alone. Neither the *Otr*, nor the *Anujnatr* is this *Turya*. All this phenomenal existence is verily related to the *Turya-Chaitanya*. This *Turya-Chaitanya* alone, which is the *Omkara*, is always the one essence of authority alone, which directs verily all the universe with the monosyllable *Om*. The *Omkara* is speech alone. It is speech alone that directs by means of sounds and syllables. This *Omkara* is verily full of sentience. The *Turya*, the supreme directory, is sentience alone. . . .[130]

There is established in this manner the complete identity of this Brahman with the *Omkara* of three *Matra*-s and the *Ardhaomatra* (the *Turyomkara*), the gross, subtle and potential states of the former, with their characteristics, qualities, and attributes, respectively identical with '*A-kara*, '*U-kara*,' and '*Ma-kara*,' the first three *Matra*-s of the *Pranava*, with their characteristics, qualities and attributes, while the *Turya-turiya* of the Brahman which is devoid of characteristics, qualities and attributes, is identical with the *Turya-turiya*, (the *Ardha-matra*), devoid of *Matra* and other attributes, the topmost resonance of the *Turyomakara* pervading the entire *Pranava* through its character of *Nada*, *Bindu*, *Kala* and *Kalatita*. . . .[131]

This syllable, '*Om*' comprises all phenomenal and noumenal existence. A supplementary explanation of this is that all that has been, all that shall be, and all that is, all is the *Omkara* alone, at all times, in all places, and under all circumstances. Whatever else that transcends the three durations, all that also is the *Omkara* alone. All phenomenal existence is verily this noumenal Brahman; this Atman is the Brahman. . . .[132]

And so on and on. Passages such as these are typical as well as important. They tell us how, given the uncompromising view about reality being

[128] *Ibid.*, *Uttara-Tapini*, II. 4.
[129] *Ibid.*, *Uttara-Tapini*, VIII. 4.
[130] *Ibid.*, *Uttara-Tapini*, II. 9-14.
[131] *Ibid.*, *Uttara-Tapini*, IV. 4.
[132] *Rama-Tapiniyupanishad*, *Purva-Tapini*, II. 1-3.

a non-differentiated unity, a means becomes the thing itself, how a synonym becomes the word, the word becomes its import and the import becomes the object itself. The passages have direct implications for the means that are to be employed and so we shall have occasion to recall them in Chapter 5. Finally, we get in them our initial glimpses into a feature which I shall take up in Chapter 7—animation; we shall see then how abstractions, empty boxes, like "*Om*," come to acquire a life of their own, how they come to assume extraordinary powers as entities in themselves.

Once "*Om*" is admitted, the more elaborate chant cannot be far behind. The *Chandogyophanishad*, like the Sama Veda itself of which it forms a part, assigns paramount significance to the chant, to *Udgitha*, the loud chant. Soon enough the name of Brahman becomes the Brahman Itself because, as has been asserted earlier, the word and its import are the same.

> Now that serene one who, rising up out of this body, reaches the highest light and appears with his own form—he is the Soul (Atman), said he (i.e. the teacher). 'That is the immortal, the fearless. That is Brahman.' Verily, the name of that Brahman is the Real (*satyam*). . . .[133]

The *Mantra* now is no different from what it invokes:

> Should the practitioner desire to purify his mind by having recourse to the reciting of *Mantras* with the help of a rosary of *Aksha* beads, then, having specifically established the fifty letters of the (Samskrt) Alphabet along with their significance in the fifty *Aksha* beads of a rosary, and having purged himself of all his sins and stood face to face with the *Mantra* he may have to conform to the rules relating to the telling of the beads of the rosary. . . .[134]

As in the case of passages about "*Om*" such passages have a direct and crucial bearing on notions about what should be done—about what should constitute the "practice" of the aspirant. They lead to schools such as that of *Nama-siddhanta* according to which all one need do, indeed all one *should* do, is to perpetually recite the many names of the Lord. It is this very process which, as we shall observe in the next chapter, reduces practice, expiation, repentance and much else to mere rituals so that merely symbolic observances come to pass for the real thing.

Once abstractions have become objects in themselves, objects are sure to become abstractions and thus to be on the way to being identified with the abstraction of all abstractions—the Absolute, the Brahman.

> There are, assuredly, two forms of Brahman: the formed and the formless. Now, that which is the formed is unreal; that which is the formless is real, is Brahman, is light. That light is the same as the sun. Verily, that

[133] *Chandogyopanishad*, VIII. 3. 4.

[134] *Akshamalikopanishad*, 1.

came to have *Om* as its soul. He divided himself (*atmanam*) threefold. Om is three prosodial units (a+u+m). By means of these the whole world is woven, warp and woof, across Him.

For thus has it been said: 'One should absorb himself, meditating that the sun is *Om*.' Now it has elsewhere been said: 'Now, then, the *Udgitha*, is *Om*; Om is the *Udgitha*. And so, verily, the *Udgitha* is yonder sun, and it is *Om*.' For thus has it been said:. . .'the *Udgitha*, which is called *Om*, a leader, brilliant, sleepless, ageless, deathless, three-footed, three-syllabled, also to be known as fivefold, hidden in the secret place (of the heart).'

For thus has it been said: 'The three-quartered has its root above. Its branches are space, wind, fire, water, earth, and the like. This Brahman has the name of "the Long Fig-tree." Belonging to It is the splendour which is you sun, and the splendour too of the syllable *Om*. Therefore one should worship it with *Om* continually. He is the only enlightener of a man'. . . .[135]

Salutation unto thee, O *Mitra*! (the friendly one), O *Bhanu*! (the radiant one), do thou protect me from death. Salutation unto the effulgent one, unto thee, the sustainer of the world! From the Sun (who partakes of the functions of the Trinity), do the elements derive their existence. By the Sun are they protected. In the Sun do they meet with their dissolution. Whatever is the Sun, that alone am I. May the radiant Sun grant us the eye of vision. Again, may the great Lord of vision grant us the eye of knowledge of the divisions of the *Pranava* (periods, such as the past, the present and the future, minutes, hours, days, months, years and so on). May he grant us the power of perception (of the non-differentiated Brahman alone). We exist for the sake of the *Aditya*, we offer service in the form of meditation unto the *Aditya*, from whom emanate thousands of rays. May that *Surya* induce in us (the proneness ever to tread on the path of righteousness)! The *Savitr* (the Sun, who extends his form) afore, the *Savitr* to the rear, the *Savitr* from above, the *Savitr* from below, may the *Savitr* vouchsafe unto us continuous influence over all things! May that *Savitr* grant us long life (for the attainment of the non-differentiated Brahman) (may He, who has attained fullness, grant us the like fullness!). . . .[136]

[135]*Maitreyopanishad*, VI, 3, 4. [136]*Suryopanishad*, 6.

5

ONE END, MANY MEANS

Just as there is only one reality, there is only one aim for man: to perceive that reality, to dissolve in it, to be one with Brahman.

> That self is dearer than a son, is dearer than wealth, is dearer than all else, since this self is nearer. If of one who speaks of anything else than the self as dear, one should say, 'He will lose what he holds dear,' he would indeed be likely to do so. One should reverence the self alone as dear. He who reverences the self alone as dear—what he holds dear, verily, is not perishable . . . .[1]

> Pratardana Daivodasi by fighting and virility arrived at the beloved abode of Indra.
> To him then Indra said: 'Pratardana, choose a boon.' Then said Pratardana: 'Do you yourself choose for me the one which you deem most beneficent to mankind.' To him then Indra said: 'A superior, verily, chooses not for an inferior. Do you yourself choose.' 'No boon, verily, then, is it to me,' said Pratardana. But Indra departed not from the truth, for Indra is truth.
> To him then Indra said: 'Understand Me, Myself. This indeed I deem most beneficent to man—namely, that one should understand Me. . . .'[2]

> Speech is not what one should desire to understand.
> One should know the speaker.
> Smell is not what one should desire to understand.
> One should know the smeller.
> Form is not what one should desire to understand.
> One should know the seer.
> Sound is not what one should desire to understand.
> One should know the hearer.
> Taste is not what one should desire to understand.
> One should know the discerner of taste.
> The deed is not what one should desire to understand.
> One should know the doer.
> Pleasure and pain are not what one should desire to understand.

[1] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, I. 4.8.

[2] *Kaushitakeyopanishad*

One should know the discerner of pleasure and pain.
Bliss, delight, and procreation are not what one should desire to understand.
One should know the discerner of bliss, delight and procreation.
Going is not what one should desire to understand.
One should know the goer.
Mind is not what one should desire to understand.
One should know the thinker . . . .[3]

The Self which is free from evil, ageless, deathless, sorrowless, hungerless, thirstless, whose desire is the Real, whose conception is the Real—He should be searched out, Him one should desire to understand. He obtains all worlds and all desires who has found out and who understands that Self. Thus spake Prajapati . . . .[4]

This Soul (Atman), assuredly, indeed, is *Ishana* (Lord), *Shambhu* (the Beneficient), *Bhava* (the Existent), *Rudra* (the Terrible), *Prajapati* (Lord of Creation), *Vishvasrij* (Creator of All), *Hiranyagarbha* (Golden Germ) Truth (*satya*), Life (*prana*), Spirit (*hams*), *Sastri* (Punisher, or Commander or Teacher), *Vishnu* (Pervader), *Narayana* (Son of Man), *Arka* (the Shining). *Savitri* (Vivifier, the sun), *Dhatri* (Creator), *Vidhatri* (Ordainer), *Samraj* (Sovereign), *Indra*, *Indu* (the moon). He it is who gives forth heat, who is covered with a thousand-eyed, golden ball, like a fire (covered) with a fire. Him, assuredly, one should desire to know. He should be searched for . . . .[5]

It is called *Tad-vana* (It-is-the-desire). As it-is-the-desire (*Tad-vana*) It should be worshiped. For him who knows it thus, all beings together yearn. . . .[6]

Ye ignorant folk, do ye direct your minds, through the penance of investigation in the right direction, to assume the attitude, 'I am the Brahman of the name of Rudra. What is Rudra (that drives away the disease of the delusion relating to things apart from the Brahman), the eternal and the most ancient food to be ardently longed for, is the Brahman of the name of Rudra alone. Apart from that there is nought . . . .'[7]

Whether the body lasts or is lost, may *Parameshvara* by all means vouchsafe unto me liberation from the delusion as to the existence or non-existence of things apart from the Brahman, which would lead me on to *Kaivalya*. . . .[8]

[3] *Ibid.*, III. 8.
[4] *Chandogyopanishad*, VIII. 7.1.
[5] *Maitreyopanishad*, VI. 8
[6] *Kenopanishad*, 4.6.
[7] *Atharvashiropanishad*, 67.
[8] *Ibid.*, 70.

The basic reason on account of which we are told to realize Brahman, of course, is that He alone is. What else can we be asked to pursue if nothing else is?

Two additional, more pragmatic, reasons are also advanced for forsaking all and aiming only at self—or Brahman—realization.

The first is that knowledge of Brahman is the key to all knowledge; indeed He is the only knowledge, He is all the knowledge there is.

> Verily, at that time the world was undifferentiated. It became differentiated just by name and form, as the saying is: 'He has such a name, such a form.' Even today this world is differentiated just by name and form, as the saying is: 'He has such a name, such a form.'
>
> He entered in here, even to the fingernail-tips, as a razor would be hidden in a razor-case, or fire in a fire-holder. Him they see not, for (as seen) He is incomplete. When breathing, He becomes breath (*prana*) by name; when speaking, the voice; when seeing, the eye; when hearing, the ear; when thinking, the mind; these are merely the names of his acts. Whoever worships one or another of these—he knows not; for He is incomplete with one or another of these. One should worship with the thought that He is just one's self (Atman), for therein all these become one. That same thing, namely, this self, is the trace (*padamya*) of this. All, for by it one who knows this All. Just, as, verily, one might find by a footprint (*pada*), thus . . .[9]

> *Brahman*hood deserts him who knows *Brahman*hood in aught else than the Soul. *Kshatra*hood deserts him who knows *Kshatra*hood in aught else than the Soul. The worlds desert him who knows the worlds in aught else than the Soul. The gods desert him who knows the gods in aught else than the Soul The Vedas desert him who knows the Vedas in aught else than the Soul. Beings desert him who knows beings in aught else than the Soul. Everything deserts him who knows everything in aught else than the Soul. This *Brahman*hood, this *Kshatra*hood, these worlds, these gods, these Vedas, all these beings, everything here is what this Soul is . . . .[10]

Secondly, without the knowledge of Brahman, sacrifices, deeds, Yogic *Kriyas*, rituals, etc., are of little avail. To be effective they must be suffused with the knowledge of Brahman. This argument follows directly from the fact that they are just aids, mere means, to help direct our minds to the Brahman; hence, unless they are suffused with the knowledge—"Knowledge" not just in the sense of intellectual acceptance of a proposition, but as the totality of experience—they are bound to be fruitless.

Now whoever departs from this world (i.e., the world of the Atman) with-

[9] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, I. 4.7.

[10] *Ibid.*, IV. 5.7; II. 4.6 ...

out having recognized it as his own, to him it is of no service, because it is unknown, as the unrecited Vedas or any other undone deed (do not help a man).

Verily, even if one performs a great and holy work without knowing this, that work of his merely perishes in the end. One should worship the Self alone as his (true) world. The work of him who worships the Self alone as his world does not perish, for out of that very Self he creates whatsoever he desires. . . .[11]

This that people say, 'By offering with milk for a year one escapes repeated death'—one should know that this is not so, since on the very day that he makes the offering he who knows escapes repeated death, for he offers all his food to the gods. . . .[12]

Verily, O Gargi, if one performs sacrifices and worships and undergoes austerity in this world for many thousands of years, but without knowing that Imperishable, limited indeed is that (work) of his. Verily, O Gargi, he who departs from this world without knowing that Imperishable is pitiable. But, O Gargi, he who departs from this world knowing that Imperishable is a Brahman . . . .[13]

He who knows this thus and he who knows not, both perform with it. Diverse, however, are knowledge and ignorance. What, indeed, one performs with knowledge, with faith (*shraddha*), with mystic doctrine (*upanishad*) that, indeed, becomes the more effective . . . .[14]

If one offers that *Agnihotra* (fire) sacrifice without knowing this—that would be just as if he were to remove the live coals and pour the offering on ashes. But if one offers the *Agnihotra* sacrifice knowing it thus, his offering is made in all worlds, in all beings, in all selves. So, as the top of a reed laid on a fire would be burned up, even so are burned up all the evils of him who offers the *Agnihotra* sacrifice knowing it thus. . . .[15]

Unsafe boats, however, are these sacrificial forms, the eighteen, in which is expressed the lower work. The fools who approve that as the better, Go again to old age and death . . . . Manifoldly living in ignorance, They think to themselves, childishly: 'We have accomplished our aim!' Since doers of deeds (*karmin*) do not understand, because of passion (*raga*). Therefore, when their worlds are exhausted, they sink down wretched.

Thinking, sacrifice and merit is the chiefest thing, Naught better do they know—deluded! Having had enjoyment on the top of the heaven won by good works, They re-enter this world, or a lower. . . .[16]

[11] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, I. 4.15.
[12] *Ibid.*, I. 5.2.
[13] *Ibid.*, III. 8.10.
[14] *Chandogyopanishad*, I. 1.10.
[15] *Ibid.*, V. 24 1-3.
[16] *Mundakopanishad*, I. 2.7, 9, 10,

That which for the ancients was (merely) a building up (of sacrificial fires) was, verily, a sacrifice to Brahman. Therefore with the building of these sacrificial fires the sacrificer should meditate upon the Soul (Atman). So, verily, indeed, does the sacrifice become really complete and indeficient. . . .[17]

That syllable of the sacred hymn (*Rig-Veda*) whereon, in highest heaven, All the gods are seated—Of what avail is the sacred hymn (*Rig-Veda*) to him who knows not That? . . .[18]

This Soul (Atman) is not to be obtained by one destitute of fortitude, nor through heedlessness, nor through a false notion of austerity (*tapas*). But he who strives by these means, provided he knows—Into his Brahma-abode this Soul (Atman) enters. . . .[19]

Hence I relate to you about the expedient to be employed for the destruction of the defects. How can knowledge become, of certainty, the bestower of Liberation, when unaccompanied by Yoga? Likewise Yoga devoid of knowledge is incompetent to bring about Liberation. Hence should the seeker after Liberation surely resort to the practice of the methods of acquiring knowledge and Yoga also at the same time. . . .[20]

Knowledge-sacrifice is better, O *Parantapa*, than material sacrifice, for all action which does not bind finds its consummation in Knowledge (*jnana*). . . . Even though thou be the most sinful of sinners, thou shalt cross the ocean of sin by the boat of knowledge . . . . As a blazing fire turns its fuel to ashes, O Arjuna, even so the fire of Knowledge turns all actions to ashes . . . . There is nothing in this world so purifying as Knowledge. He who is perfected by Yoga finds it in himself in the fullness of time. . . .[21]

Thus, the Upanishads teach us, realizing the Brahman and, upon realization, dissolving in Him, is the only aim for man.

Our not knowing the Brahman, the nature of reality, is said to be the fount to all our miseries and, *ipso facto*, the removal of this *avidya* ends the cycle of life and death, it dissolves us in the Brahman, in unchanging, perpetual Bliss.

Then Samkrti asked Aditya thus: 'Pray relate unto me O Lord! the *Brahma-vidya*.' Aditya replied unto him thus: 'I shall presently relate O Samkrti! about the knowledge of the truth, which is rarely attainable (by

[17] *Maitreyopanishad*, I. 1.
[18] *Shvetashvataropanishad*, IV. 8.
[19] *Mundakopanishad*, III. 2.4.
[20] *Yogatattvopanishad*, 14, 15; *Yogashikhopanishad*, 12-14 & 51, 52 are similar.
[21] *Bhagavad Gita*, IV. 33, 36-8.

any one). Listen. By the thorough knowledge of it alone, thou wilt becomes a *Jivan-mukta*. Looking upon (the Brahman), the all, the one, the originless, the quiescent, the endless, the constant, the wasteless, which, in reality, is of the form of supreme sentience (in the attitude, "I am the Brahman"), do thou remain quiescent, and at ease . . . . .'[22]

Neither wealth, nor friends, nor relations, nor the agitation caused by self-inflicted bodily pain, nor the resort to places of pilgrimage and sanctuaries would help one in accomplishing his purpose to any large extent, (as all these are but the fancies of the mind). The goal of realizing Brahman is attained only through that perfect knowledge (by means of which alone, the mind which is the real cause of all misery is conquered and reduced to nought). . . .[23]

(With minds by no means changing), they (the *Jivan-muktas*) do something or not even that, by way of attending to their daily routine. Instructed by those about them, when rising out of their trance, they resort to such work alone as would be consistent with their previous conduct, behaving very much like men just risen from sleep . . . . Even as there is light, only so long as there is the lamp (that gives the light), even as there is broad daylight, only so long as the sun shines in the firmament, even as there is the delightful fragrance of the flower, only so long as there is the fully-blossomed flower, even so, so long as the supreme sentience of the Brahman prevails, so long this phenomenal world of ours remains with the supreme sentience of the Brahman alone as its mainstay. (Hence, do thou arrive at the conclusion that the peerless Brahman alone prevails, throwing into the background all phenomena, known and unknown, that are apart from it.) This phenomenal world exists only in the form of an illusion, but, from the point of view of the highest truth, *it ceases to exist with the attainment of the clear vision of the eye of knowledge*, and the dawning of the right awakening on the vast horizon of the pure mind of the seeker. (As the phenomenal world thus turns out to be after all, a phantom, the substratum on which it is superimposed, *viz.*, the Brahman, proves to be the one peerless existence alone.)[24]

But, as was emphasized earlier, this knowledge—this *vidya*—must go beyond intellectual conviction, it must become our being. Seeing dual, the Upanishads say, is being dual. And so duality can be said to have gone, knowledge can be said to have been attained, only when we have internalized non-duality, that is when we live in the premise of non-duality and when we do so naturally, that is without any conscious effort. Thus is philosophy known as *darshan*, an experience that suffuses our very being. A

[22] *Akshyopanishad*, II. 1, 2.
[23] *Mahopanishad*, IV. 21-8.
[24] *Ibid.*, V. 316-42.

person who is content with mere theoretical information about Brahman and does not *experience* the state of being Brahman is, says the *Maitreyopanishad*, a fool, he is like the man who instead of tasting the fruit stares at their reflection in the lake.[25] Similarly, mere bookish knowledge of scriptures, mere intellectual knowledge without actual immersion in the Self is, declares the *Samnayasopanishad*, like the load of saffron flowers carried by a camel, a mere burden.[26]

Having proclaimed the undifferentiated pure consciousness as the sole reality, we have now progressed to a normative proposition: the only legitimate aim for man is to dissolve his self into that reality. We can now pick up the thread where we left it at the end of Chapter 3. For we noticed there that the initial responsibility for our seeing dual (and, therefore, for our being dual) is put on the mind. Reining it in thus becomes the first, proximate objective.

The Upanishadic teaching about the means by which *vidya* may be attained can be summarized in five propositions:

(*i*) Mind is the proximate cause of *avidya* and, hence, of bondage; it is also the preliminary means by which we may set ourselves on the road to liberation.

(*ii*) From a practical standpoint, mind is ideation and this is mercurial.

(*iii*) Therefore, ideas are to be stilled to the point where the mind has been completely dissolved.

(*iv*) There are various ways of stilling the mind. Each aspirant must follow the way that is particularly suited to him. He must know, however, that each of the ways requires faith, perseverance and grace—grace of the Absolute, the deity, the *guru*.

(*v*) Ultimately one must transcend all these devices; ultimately knowledge, reason, etc., are not enough.

As these propositions form the essence of the tradition's view about "practice," I will devote this chapter to documenting them.

(*i*) *Mind as the cause of bondage as well as the preliminary means for transcending bondage*

The mind, in truth, is for mankind
The means of bondage and release:
For bondage, if to objects bound;
From objects free—that's called release. . . .[27]

[25] *Maitreyopanishad*, 2.23.
[26] *Samnyasopanishad*, 2.75.
[27] *Maitreyopanishad*, VI. 34; *Tripura-tapinyupanishad*, V. 6 is similar, as are *Amrita-bindupanishad*, 1-2.

The mind alone is possessed of the requisite skill for the firm control over the mind. Who is there (save the king), that is skilled enough, in the matter of controlling a king, through any other person, who is not a king himself? In the case of persons, that have been clutched by the crocodile of avarice, that have fallen in the ocean of wordly existence, and whose sinking could be inferred only from the swirl, the only boat that could save them, *viz.*, their own mind, stands aloof. Cutting the rope of the mind, which binds fast, with the mind alone, do thou cause thyself to be rescued from (the ocean of) worldly existence. This (ocean) is incapable of being crossed in any other manner. . . .[28]

That *Taraka* is twofold: *Murti-taraka* (corporeal) and *Amurti-taraka* (incorporeal). That which culminates with the senses is corporeal; that which transcends the eyebrows is incorporeal. In all cases, in making out the inner import, the practice along with the mind is desirable. With the *Taraka*-s could be found what exists above them, the Brahman alone of the *Sat-Chit-Ananda* form, which is the result of introspection with the help of the mind. Hence it is manifest that the Brahman is of spotless white lustre. That Brahman becomes knowable by means of introspection with the eye aided by the mind. So also is the *Amurti-taraka* (incorporeal). It is only by seeing with the aid of the mind, that *Dahara* and the other kindred forms of *Akasha* become knowable. Perception of form being dependent on the mind and the eye, externally as well as inwardly, it is only by the conjunction of the Atman, the mind and the eyes, that the perception of form is achieved. Hence internal perception in conjunction with the mind is essential for the manifestation of *Taraka*. . . . [29]

One-coloured-ness (whiteness) is the quality of milk, of cows of various colours; the wise man looks upon the knowledge of the Brahman as on milk; and on the people with various garbs as on the cows. *Vijnana* (knowledge) abides hidden in being after being, even as butter does in milk. Hence should churning be constantly made in the mind by every being with the churning-stick of the mind. . . .[30]

Even as foam is produced in a vessel containing a liquid, only by churning, so also, it is only from churning the mind that various doubts arise. . . .[31]

The mind, the root of all volition and the like, is the cause of bondage. The mind, rid of all that, conduces to liberation . . . .[32]

[28] *Mahopanishad*, IV. 88-106.
[29] *Advaya-Tarakopanishad*, 10.
[30] *Amrita-Bindupanishad*, 19, 20.
[31] *Trisikhibrahmanopanishad*, 10-14.
[32] *Manadalabrahmanopanishad*, II. 5.4.

(ii) *Mind, for practical purposes, is the entire corpus of ideation: its chief characteristic is its mercurial nature, its hypersensitivity to external stimuli.*

The Upanishads give a wide variety of similies for the mind. They liken it to a monkey among trees,[33] a demon,[34] a dog wandering through an entire village,[35] a disease,[36] "a wandering and wayward damsel. . . with her thousands of crooked transformations, tending to go astray at every moment. . ."[37] and so on.

> The mind forms the root of the tree of wordly existence, which has thousands of sprouts and branches and its characteristic buds and fruits. The mind, I consider, is ideation alone. By tranquillizing ideation, do thou dry it up at once, in such a way, that the tree of worldly existence would wither up in consequence. There is only one expedient that could be employed for the curbing of one's own mind. The well-being of the mind lies in its destruction. The destruction of the mind is the highest prosperity one could attain. The mind of the knower meets with destruction, while the mind of the ignorant man is the chain that binds him. So long as the mind is not conquered by one having recourse to the confirmed practice of meditating on the one real existence, so long will *Vasana*-s continue to gallop in his heart, like goblins in their midnight revels. The *Vasana*-s, (latent desires), for enjoyment, of one who has quelled the pride of his mind and vanquished his foes of the organs of perception and action, wither away like lotus-ponds in the depth of winter. . . .[38]

Now, why is the mind so fickle and what should one do about it?

> The proneness to respond to external stimuli, inherent in the state of sentience of the eternal verity of the Atman, which is infinite and is of the form of generic existence, wise men know that as the sprout of ideation. That, which at first attains the state of subtle existence, that alone, by degress, attains palpability, by densely filling the eternal verity of sentience, to the point of non-sentience, very much like the formation of a cloud (from subtle and transparent steam). Then, considering its responsivity, as though it were not part of itself, this state of sentience attains, as it were, the state of ideation, even as a seed attains the state of a sprout. Ideation is verily the creature of sentience. It is generated of its own accord and soon grows of its own accord, contributing to misery and by no means to well-being. Do thou never cause ideations to come into existence. Do thou never entertain conceptions of worldly existence. Should ideations arise through thy carelessness, do thou put forth all effort with great caution, in the direction of uprooting all ideations. Then alone will ideations not pursue

[33] *Anna-Purnopanishad*, III. 2.8.
[34] *Mahopanishad*, III. 16-26.
[35] *Nrisimha-Tapinyupanishad*, *Uttara-Tapini*, IV. 6.
[36] *Muktikopanishad*, 2.32-47.
[37] *Ibid.*, V. 33-48.
[38] *Ibid.*, IV. 88.

> In the absence of anything to grasp, the *Jiva*, which is the *Prana* of the mind, endowed with certain knowledge, will get dissolved in the transcendent pure existence, as a lump of salt in water and will see the Universe, which is an aggregate of illusions and magic snares, as in a dream....[41]

> The moment when the Mind, freed from the influence of the objects of desire and entirely controlled in the heart, reaches the state of non-existence of its own self, that moment it reaches its transcendent state. So long only should it be checked, as long as it becomes powerless in the heart; this is Wisdom as well as Meditation; the rest is logomachy pure and simple....[42]

Hundreds of passages stressing the need to still and then dissolve the mind can be listed.

A few representative ones from the *Samanya-Vedanta Upanishads* will have to suffice. The reader will notice that while they make the same basic point, there are many nuances to them and different corollaries follow from the different passages.

> This misconception known as the Universe is verily a fabrication of what is non-existent.... This misconception has for its root-cause the mind and will not arise, if the mind ceases to function. Hence, fix the mind in deep contemplation of the form of the innermost transcendent Atman....[43]

> Liberation is not (to be had) behind the ethereal firmament, nor in the nether world, nor on this earth. The dissolution of the mind, on the eradication of all desires, is known as liberation....[44]

> When the mind (with all its virtuous and vicious *Vasana*-s) is given up, all sense of dualism perishes along with it. (With the dissolution of the differentiating mind), there remains (the non-dual Brahman without a counterpart), what is the exquisite quiescence, the one transparent and non-ailing entity, which is the endless, the originless, the indistinct, the dotageless, the tranquillized, the non-swerving, the peerless, which is devoid of beginning and end, the foremost direct perception, the singular entity without either beginning or end, the absolute sentience, which is flawless and fully expanded, which is intensely subtler than ether, that Brahman thou art, there is no doubt about it....[45]

> Giving up all mental processes, do thou become filled with what remains thereafter. Should there be anything to thy taste, thou art bound to it, as long as existence lasts. Should there be nothing for which thou

[41] *Trisikhibrahmanopanishad*, 159.
[42] *Adhyatmopanishad*, II. 22-7.
[43] *Amrita-Bindupanishad*, 3-5.
[44] *Ibid.*, V. 62-70.
[45] *Anna-Purnopanishad*, II. 22-5.

hast cultivated a taste, thou art liberated from that, as long as existence lasts. Hence, out of the multitude of objects, animate and inanimate, beginning with grass and ending with the body, let nothing be to thy taste. . . .[46]

The existence of the mind is the cause of the greatest misery. The giving up of the mind will result in the highest bliss. Hence, do thou lead the mind unto its dissolution in the ether of sentience, through the absence of perception and having seen whatever is agreeable, or not agreeable, the firm posture, as of a rock, should be assumed by thee. Through one's own effort in this direction, worldly existence will stand vanquished. . . .[47]

From subjection to the whims of one's own individuality there is ruin. From individuality arise misery and anguish. From subjection to individuality springs all exertion. There is no more powerful enemy than individuality. Whatever, whether animate or inanimate, was enjoyed by me, when under the influence of individuality, all that is unsubstantial, while freedom from individuality is alone the real substance. The mind leaps hither and thither in a highly distracted state to no purpose and strays far away, even as a dog wandering through an entire village. Having been rendered dull-witted and overpowered by the cruel mind attended with covetousness as its partner in life, O Brahma! I have been eaten up as it were by that street-dog (of the mind) alone. Mind-control, O Brahma! is more difficult of accomplishment than even the drinking up of the vast ocean, than even the uprooting of Mount Meru, nay, than even the eating of fire. The mind is the root-cause of all the objects of desire. While that exists, the three worlds also exist. When that is destroyed, the three worlds are also destroyed. Hence should it be treated with great effort. . . .[48]

Shouldst thou practise, every moment, the avoidance of following in the wake of thy resolves and desires then alone wouldst thou attain the hallowed state of non-mindedness. The cessation of the mind from its manifold kinds of functioning is what is known as *Samadhana*, (through absorption of the mind into its own self). That alone is the state of alone-ness. That is the auspicious state of exquisite bliss. Giving up the conception by the mind of all things (apart from the Atman, such as the body, the phenomenal world and the like) as the Atman alone, do thou take thy stand as thou wilt, (in the state of absolute silence of the Brahman), very much like a deaf-mute that is blind. (That Brahman is) the all, that is tranquillity *par excellence*, the originless, the one, the beginningless and the middle-less, the self-effulgent one that shines all-round, that is absolute sentience, that has as the index of its accomplish-

[46]*Ibid.*, V. 95-106. [47]*Ibid.*, V. 112-4. [48]*Mahopanishad*, III. 16-24.

ment the cessation of all functionings of the mind....[49]

When this thinking mind of ours is cut through by means of the knife of the cessation of ideations then one becomes the Brahman, the all, the omnipresent and the quiescent. He, who is possessed of a high intellect, is liberated from the evils arising from paying homage to worldly existence. Do thou control thyself with an undistracted mind. When the mind is completely thrown into the background (by being rendered functionless), the state of supreme sentience (of the Brahman is attained forthwith). Catching hold of the maximum amount of manliness, and reducing the mind to a state of non-mindedness, unhesitatingly kill the mind, with the sharp edge of the revolving discus of sentience, through intensely meditating upon the sentience (of the Atman) seated in the ether of the heart. Then will the enemies (of thine, such as lust, anger, greed, delusion, infatuation and spite) not keep thee in bondage. 'That yonder,' 'He,' 'I,' 'This near,' 'That yonder,' 'Mine,'—thus far alone is the range of the mind. By the total stoppage of its functioning (either from within or from without), it will be cut asunder, as if by a cutting machine. Even as the flimsy gathering of clouds in the sky is swept away by a random wind in autumn, so also is the mind clearly swept off from the interior (of the microcosm). There is no possibility of injury to a person who is non-minded, even if diluvian winds should blow or all the (seven) oceans should flow into one, or the twelve *Aditya*-s (suns) heat the earth (with all their fury simultaneously). In that supreme realm of nonideation, which is possible to be obtained exclusively through non-ideation, and bestows all kinds of accomplishments (such as psychic powers and the like), do thou take thy stand, firmly resting on that non-minded state, as thy support. Nowhere is the mind seen devoid of fickle-ness. Fickleness is the characteristic of the mind, even as heat is the characteristic of fire.... This fickleness of its, is of the character of the impression left on it by the ignorance of the Atman. Do thou destroy that (fickleness), otherwise called *Vasana*, (latent impression), through investigation into the real nature of the Atman....[50]

The man of self-control should, foremost of all, conquer his own mind, by firmly pressing one hand against the other, by gnashing one set of teeth against the other and by bringing one set of limbs to bear on another as it were. So long as the mind, that has to be subjugated, holds out, apart from the conquest of the mind there is no other course left open to one for being saved from the ocean of worldly existence. The mighty foes of the organs of perception and action, holding sway over the kingdom of hell, equipped with the squadrons of infuriated elephants of wicked deeds and profusely discharging the volleys of javelins and arrows of the form of wicked desires, are verily unconquerable, (except

[49] *Ibid.*, IV. 6-16.

[50] *Ibid.*, IV. 88-106.

through total abstinence from sensual pleasures). The tendencies towards enjoyments of various kinds (due to the influence of previous impressions), of one who has quelled the pride of the mind and has subdued the enemies of his senses, fade away like lotus-ponds in winter. As long as the mind has not been conquered through the practice of intense meditation on the absolute truth of (the Brahman), so long would *Vasana*-s–(the latent tendencies towards the gratification of desires), gallop wildly in the head, like vampires in their night-revels.

Methinks, the mind of a discerning, wise man is a servant for the reason that it acts according to his desires. It is his counsellor, for the reason that it is the prime cause for success in *all* his undertakings. It is a neighbouring ruler of his, (for the reason that it is) over ready to attack him with its hosts of the organ of perception and action. Methinks, the mind of a man of intellect, is a charming woman paying court to him, for the reason that it tries to win him over. It is a father and guardian of his, for the reason that it seeks to protect him. It is indeed a friend for the reason that implicit faith is reposed by him thereon. When closely looked upon by a person, from the point of view of the *Shastra*-s, by applying his intellect and his own previous experience, the mind is *in loco parentis* to him, as it bestows the height of success on him, completely abnegating its own self (even as a father would, if need be, sacrifice himself for the sake of his progeny). The beautiful gem of the mind, when set in the middle of the necklace of the heart, shines well with fascinatingly brilliant lustre, clinging firmly to the thread of its qualities, fine-looking yet profligate, firmly fastened yet likely to burst asunder at any moment, transparent yet likely to become clouded with misconceptions, easily surpassed (only by the Brahman that is identical with the Atman) and fully roused to the perception, (that there is nothing apart from the Brahman). Do thou become possessed of vision enough to visualize this gem of the mind, O Brahmana! which is shorn of its brilliance due to its having been imbedded in the impure mud of various kinds, after washing it with the water of discrimination (of the form, that apart from the Brahman there is nought), shouldst thou succeed in accomplishing thy aim in life.[51]

Do thou rescue the mind, O Brahman, that is scorched with the flame of worries, crushed by the python of anger, delighted with being washed by the waves of the ocean of lust, and has cleanly forgotten its grandsire, the creator, even as thou would an elephant from a quagmire. . . .[52]

The transconscious, inartificial dissolution of the mind, they know as Yoga. Do thy deeds, taking thy stand on such Yoga, but never do (them) in an insipid manner. . . .[53]

(The mind turned inwards), aiming at the highest state, (devoid of impres-

[51] Ibid., V. 75-81. [52] Ibid., V. 118-144. [53] [illegible], II. 3.

sions), is what is said to be of attenuated impressions. The mind devoid of impressions is (the mind) which, through the absence of impressions (relating to the existence or non-existence of things apart from the Atman), attains the state of actionlessness. The conception of the mind as the active agent, is what is known as the state of palpable (mental) impressions. Hence, one should attenuate mental impressions, which give rise to misery of all kinds. Giving up the misconception resulting from looking upon everything (apart from the Atman) as the Atman, by remaining always with the face turned inwards, everything (other than the Atman) attains the state of ether, (becomes void). . . .[54]

By making mind all motionless,
From sloth and from distraction freed,
When unto mindlessness one comes,
Then that is the supreme estate!
So long the mind should be confined,
Till in the heart it meets its end.
That is both knowledge and release!
All else is but a string of words! . . .[55]

Many corollaries follow from passages such as these. I will confine myself to just one of them. As the object is to still the mind, to direct it inwards, to take it out of the reach of external stimuli, it follows that conventional empirical knowledge must necessarily be abjured. Again and again the Upanishads tell us to get back to the knowledge of a deaf-mute who is blind, to the knowledge of a newly-born babe . . . .[56]

Indeed, not just knowledge about things and events around us, but even curiosity and wonder about them must be eschewed, they must be stilled away.

> . . . Should the Sun be cool-beamed, should the disc of the Moon be hot-rayed, should the flame of fire project downwards, (even then), the *Jivan-mukta* is not filled with wonder. While the Supreme Truth is the abode of the *Jivan-mukta*, no curiosity is roused in him in the cluster of wonderful phenomena, as in the case of rope-snake.[57]
>
> Whatever *Vasana* (fancy), of what is known as the mind, arises, infused with former perceptions of the mind, that (fancy) should the wise man obliterate then and there. Thence alone will there be destruction of

[54] *Anna-Purnopanishad*, I. 28-39
[55] *Maitreyopanishad*, VI. 34; the identical expression occurs in, for instance, *Amrita-Bindupanishad*, I, 2 and *Tripura-tapinyupanishad*, V. 5.
[56] For instance, *Anna-Purnopanishad*, III. 9-17, IV. 46-78, V. 112-8; *Mahopanishad*, IV.6-16; *Subalopanishad*, XIII. etc.
[57] *Anna-Purnopanishad*, IV. 1-10.

ignorance. Having given up fancying exclusively about enjoyment of sensual pleasures, do thou give up fancying about differentiation as well. Giving up thereafter all conceptions relating to the existence or non-existence of fancy, apart from the Atman, do thou become blissful, devoid of all changing conceptions, (which are the result of indulging in fancy). Such destruction of the mind alone will verily bring about the destruction of ignorance (in its entirety). There is avoidance of interest in whatever is understood only to a slight extent. Absence of interest is verily *Nirvana*, (annihilation of the mind). Ignorance verily seems to persist in dull-witted persons with a low degree of intuition. But whence is the scope for its occurrence in a man of clear intellect, who could recognize by its very name, that *A-vidya* is verily non-existent?[58]

. . . Wise men know that taking undue interest in any thing is the storehouse of all misery. Absence of such interest in any thing that is in the vicinity, they know as the temple of all kinds of well-being. When enmeshed within the bonds of *Vasana* (latent desires), this world runs counter to its normal course. *Vasana* brings untold misery in its train, when it is allowed to preponderate. When thwarted, it contributes to well-being.[59]

One should destroy the enemies of the form of the organs of perception and action, whenever they raise their heads or even when they do not, with the club of discrimination, again and again, very much like Hari (Indra) vanquishing the mountains with his *Vajra* (thunder-bolt).[60]

O thou of mighty intellect! The destruction of *Vasana*-s and the obliteration of worldly knowledge and the mind, when practised simultaneously for a long time, are considered as bestowing the fruit (of the perception of the Brahman). As long as these three are not practised simultaneously, so long the attainment of the state of Brahman does not take place, even after the lapse of a hundred years. Even if these are practised one at a time for a long time, it will not be enough, as they do not prove fruitful, very much like *Mantra*-s, (mystic formulas), when split and muttered part by part, though for a ling time. Through the practising together of these three for a long time, the fast knots of the heart (doubts) give way without doubt, even as the fine threads of the lotus-stalk would, when the stalk is cut off.[61]

The proper state for the mind thus is not one in which it is receiving data about the external world, processing it and telling us what it is we should be doing. The proper state for it is its state when we are in deep sleep, when all our senses, all our faculties are withdrawn, rolled up, stilled.

[58] *Mahopanishad*, IV. 107-115. [59] *Ibid.*, V. 84-96. [60] *Ibid.*, VI. 21.
[61] *Muktikopanishad*, II. 10-15.

To him then he said: 'O Gargya, as the rays of the setting sun all become one in an orb of brilliance and go forth again and again when it rises, even so, (in sleep) verily, everything here becomes one in mind, the highest god.'

Therefore in that condition, the person hears not, sees not, smells not, tastes not, touches not, speaks not, takes not, enjoys not, emits not, moves not about. 'He sleeps!' they say. . . .[62]

There, in sleep, that god experiences greatness. Whatever object has been seen, he sees again; whatever has been heard, he hears again. That which has been severally experienced in different places and regions, he severally experiences again and again. Both what has been seen and what has not been seen, both what has been heard and what has not been heard, both what has been experienced and what has not been experienced, both the real and the unreal—he sees all. He sees it, himself being all.

When he is overcome with brilliance, then that god sees no dreams; then here in this body arises this happiness.[63]

Then Uddalaka Aruni said to Shvetaketu, his son: 'Understand from me, my dear, the condition of sleep. When a person here sleeps, as it is called, then, my dear, he has reached Being, he has gone to his own. Therefore they say of him 'he sleeps': for he has gone to his own.[64]

But those of one's (fellows) who are alive there, and those who have departed, and whatever else one desires but does not get—all this one finds by going in there (i.e. in the Soul); for there, truly, are those real desires of his which have a covering of what is false.

So, just as those who do not know the spot might go over a hid treasure of gold again and again, but not find it, even so all creatures here go day by day to that Brahma-world (in deep sleep), but do not find it, for truly they are carried astray by what is false.[65]

. . . Then, taking him by the hand, he went forth. The two then came upon a person asleep. Him the Ajatasatru addressed: 'O great, white-robed King Soma!' But he just lay silent. Thereupon he threw at him a stick. Thereupon he arose.

To him then Ajatasatru said: 'Where in this case, O Balaki, has this person lain? What has become of him here? Whence has he returned here?'

Thereupon Balaki understood not.

To him then Ajatasatru said: 'Where in this case, O Balaki, this person has lain, what has become of him here, whence he has returned here—as I asked—are the channels of a person called *hita* ('the Beneficent'). From the heart they spread forth to the pericardium. Now, they are as minute

[62] *Prashnopanishad*, IV. 2.
[63] *Ibid.*, IV. 5, 6.
[64] *Chandogya Upanishad*, VI. 8, 1.
[65] *Ibid.*, VIII. 3.2

as a hair subdivided a thousandfold. They consist of a minute essence, reddish-brown, white, black, yellow, and red. In these one remains while, asleep, he sees no dream whatsoever.

Then he becomes unitary in this *Prana*.
Then speech together with all names goes to it;
The eye together with all forms goes to it;
The ear together with all sounds goes to it;
The mind together with all thoughts goes to it. . . .[66]

Ajatasatru said: 'When this man fell asleep thus, where then was the person who consists of intelligence? Whence did he thus come back?'

And this also Gargya did not know.

Ajatasatru said: 'When this man has fallen asleep thus, then the person who consists of intelligence, having by his intelligence taken to himself the intelligence of these senses, rests in that place which is the space within the heart. When that person restrains the senses, that person is said to be asleep. Then the breath is restrained. The voice is restrained. The eye is restrained. The ear is restrained. The mind is restrained.

When he goes to sleep, these worlds are his. Then he becomes a great king, as it were. Then he becomes a great Brahman, as it were. He enters the high and the low, as it were. As a great king, taking with him his people, moves around in his own country as he pleases, even so here this one, taking with him his senses, moves around in his own body as he pleases.

Now, when one falls sound asleep, when one knows nothing whatsoever, having crept out through the seventy-two thousand channels called *hita*, which lead from the heart to the pericardium, one rests in the pericardium. Verily, as a youth or a great king or a great Brahmin might rest when he has reached the summit of bliss, so this one now rests.[67]

(*iv*) *What means, what devices should the aspirant use for stilling and then dissolving the mind?*

The tradition opens up a veritable cafetaria for the aspirant. It offers a very wide variety of devices and leaves it to the aspirant to choose—with the help of his teachers, of the texts which record what the seers have found useful—the set that is most suited to him. To each the tradition, the *guru* commends what is appropriate for him. Indeed, guiding the aspirant through the wide variety of devices to the means that are appropriate to his disposition, to his stage of pursuit is the task of the *guru*. In a famous passage the *Brihad-Aranyaka* cites for us the counsel of Prajapati and its differing import for different pupils.

[66] *Kaushitakeyopanishad*, IV. 19, 20.
[67] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, II, 1.16-19; see all of II. 1-20, IV.19-34.

The threefold offspring of Prajapati—gods, men, and devils—dwelt with their father Prajapati as students of sacred knowledge. Having lived the life of a student of sacred knowledge, the gods said: 'Speak to us, sir.' To them then he spoke this syllable, '*Da*.' 'Did you understand?' 'We did understand,' said they, 'You said to us, "Restrain yourself".' 'Yes (*Om*),' said he, 'You did understand.'

So then the men said to him: 'Speak to us, sir.' To them he spoke this syllable, '*Da*.' 'Did you understand?' 'We did understand,' said they, 'You said to us, "Give".' 'Yes (*Om*),' said he, 'You did understand.'

So then the devils said to him: 'Speak to us, sir.' To them then he spoke this syllable, '*Da*.' 'Did you understand?' 'We did understand,' said they, 'You said to us, "Be compassionate".' 'Yes (*Om*),' said he, 'You did understand' . . . .[68]

Other Upanishads and, of course, the Gita also stress the same point.

The one radiant *Parama-purusha*, though really devoid of differentiation and peerless, is resorted to in diverse forms by seekers, due to the diversity in the stage of development of their minds, so much so, that the Originless *Paramatman* is subjected to birth of diverse forms. The *Adhvaryus* (sacrificial priests) adore him, (who has attained the state of *Aniruddha-narayana*), as *Agni* of the triple form. The adherents of the *Yajur-Veda*, by looking upon him as the *Yajur-Veda*, combining in him all this phenomenal world of beings. The *Chando-ga*-s adore him as the *Sama-Veda*, in the attitude that in him all the *Saman*-s have their mainstay. Serpents look upon him as their venom. Snake-charmers look upon him as the snake. The celestials look upon him as their food, *viz.* nectar. Men look upon him as wealth. *Asura*-s look upon him as *Maya*. *Pitr*-s (the names of the departed), look upon him as *Svadha*. Worshippers of various deities look upon him as their respective deities. *Gandharva*-s look upon him as beauty. *Apsara*-s look upon him as fragrance. In whichever form one worships him, the worshipper becomes that alone. For this reason the more exalted knower of the Brahman should always assume the attitude, 'I am the *Parabrahman* of the form of the *Purusha*.' By doing so, he becomes of the same form, he, who knows thus.[69]

As the preceding passage from the *Mudgalopanishad* implies, the tradition is not permissive, it is accommodating. It does not say "do what you will," it says "do what is appropriate to your dispositions and state of development." And, as the concluding part of the passage implies, the rewards from pursuing different courses are dissimilar.

The *Gita's* position is typical. It assures the aspirant, for instance, that "whatever form one desires to worship in faith and devotion, in that very

[68] *Ibid.*, V, 2.1-3.

[69] *Mudgalopanishad*, III, 1-7

form I make that faith of his secure."[70] But in the next breath it adds that "those who worship the gods go to the gods, those who worship Me come to Me."[71] Similarly, it asks the aspirant to set his mind on the Absolute, to merge in Him; if he finds that to be beyond his capacity, he should take to constant practice; if he finds that too to be beyond his capacity, he should seek to win Him by constant service and, failing the last too, he should abandon all fruit to Him. But it adds in the very next *shloka* that the rewards from the different devices are carefully graded.[72]

All the Upanishads seem to agree that the first step in bringing the mind to heel is to quell or overcome desires. Indeed, some of the harshest strictures are reserved for our desires.

> When are liberated all
> The desires that lodge in one's heart,
> Then a mortal becomes immortal!
> Therein he reaches Brahman!
> When are cut all
> The knots of the heart here on earth,
> Then a mortal becomes immortal!
> —Thus far is the instruction . . . .[73]

> Therefore, wise men know the mind attached to *Vasana* as subject to bondage. When completely rid of *Vasana*, it is said to be liberated. Do thou attain at once, O great chief of the Monkeys! the state of mind devoid of *Vasana*-s. From the thorough realization of the truth (that apart from the Brahman there is nought) *Vasana* gets dissolved. With the dissolution of *Vasana*, the mind attains final repose like the oil-less lamp. He, who, after giving up all *Vasana*-s, and devoid of all distractions, stands firmly established in Me, who am of the form of absolute sentience, he is no other than I, who am of the character of existence, sentience and bliss . . . .[74]

The *Gita* is equally emphatic:

> 'But by what, dragged on, O Varshneya,' asks Arjuna, 'does a man, though reluctant, commit sin, as if constrained by force?' And Krishna answers, 'It is by desire, by wrath, born of energy of *Raja*-s, all-devouring, all sinful; that, know though is the foe here. As fire is surrounded by smoke, as a mirror by rust, as the foetus is enclosed in the womb, so is

[70] *Bhagvad Gita*, VII. 21.
[71] *Ibid.*, VII. 23, IX. 24.
[72] *Kathopanishad*, VI. 14-15.
[73] *Ibid.*, XII, 6-12. For confirmatory passages that affirm that rewards differ according to the means adopted see, for instance, *Kaushitakeyopanishad*, IV. 3-18; *Chandogyopanishad*, VII. 1-15; *Taittiriyopanishad*, III. 10. 3, 4; *Maitreyopanishad*, IV. 6; *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, I. 5.13.
[74] *Muktikopanishad*, II. 16-23.

this covered by it. Covered, O son of Kunti, is wisdom by this constant enemy of the wise, in the form of desire, which is greedy and insatiable. The senses, mind and reason are said to be its seat; veiling wisdom through these, it deludes the embodied . . . .'[75]

Hence its judgement,

He attains peace, into whom all desires enter as waters enter the ocean, which, filled from all sides, remains unaltered; but not he who desires objects. That man attains peace who, abandoning all desires, moves about without attachment, without selfishness, without vanity . . . .[76]

To overcome all desires one must still the sense organs, one must put all sense objects out of one's mind so that henceforth temptations are, as the *Maitreyopanishad* says, mere harlots entering a deserted house.[77]

But may it not be that the best way to quell desires is to actually give them a little rein? Would total denial not transform mere wanting into obsessive hankering? No, says the Upanishad:

Desires do not subside by giving scope for their enjoyment; like fire fed by oblation, they only increase all the more . . . .[78]

Having overcome all desires one must annihilate individuality, "name and form," "determination," one must annihilate "conception" itself.[79]

The Upanishads offer a very wide array of means by which each of these states may be achieved and transcended. These range from physical postures, to wearing, say, the *Rudraksha mala* or the *Tripundra* marks, to various forms and stages of meditation, to renunciation of fruit, to renunciation of action itself, to devotional surrender to God, to sacrifices, to recitation of words and phrases, to sexual antics and so on.

In one Upanishad or, more charitably, at one stage in one's progress, for instance, one is counselled silence:

For him, whose mind is rid of *Vasana*, the attainment of the highest state is not through actionlessness resulting from renunciation; the attainment of the exalted state of the Brahman is not through the performance of

75 *Bhagvad-Gita*, 3. 36-40.

76 *Ibid.*, 2. 70-1

77 *Maitreyopanishad*, VI. 10.

78 *Narada-Parivrajakopanishad*, 3. 37.

79 So as to avoid excessive repetition I have confined myself mainly to citing passages from the Upanishads alone. The propositions can be illustrated by recalling verses from the *Gita* also. It repeatedly tells the aspirant to restrain, to calm his mind (for instance, 2. 65-8; 3. 40-3; 6. 11-27, 34-6), that for this he must quell his senses (for instance, 2. 60-1), by withdrawing from sense objects (e.g., 2. 58, 62-3), by curbing desire (e.g., 2. 70, 71; 3.36-40 cited above), by giving up sundry aims and devoting himself exclusively to the singular purpose of attaining the supreme secret (e.g., 2.41-4) and so on.

> sacrificial rituals, nor through the remaining in the equipoised state of *Samadhi*, nor through the muttering of *Mantra*-s. Apart from silence, assumed along with a mind devoid of *Vasana*, there is no more exalted state for anyone.[80]

In another Upanishad, or at another stage, loud chanting is most advisable. The brief *Mandukyopanishad*, for instance, is entirely devoted to the expression "*Om*"—to its mystic significance and its potency. The *Chandogyopanishad*, as already noted, places paramount reliance on *Udgitha*, the loud chant. The sectarian Upanishads as well as several others are full of sounds and *mantra*-s for the aspirant to use.

The array is so great and the exposition of each device is so varied that even when the same word is being used one cannot be certain that the same meaning is intended. Thus, for instance, we are often told that the aspirant must be a *Brahmacharya*, a celibate.

> But only they who find that Brahma-world through the chaste life of a student of sacred knowledge (*brahmacharya*)—only they possess that Brahma-world. In all worlds they possess unlimited freedom.[81]

But of what does "the chaste life of a student" consist? In many cases it would imply complete continence. But often enough one comes across a more liberal meaning.

> Day and night, verily, are the Lord of Creation (Prajapati). Of this, day indeed is life; the night matter. Verily, they waste their life who join in sexual enjoyment by day; it is chastity that they join in sexual enjoyment by night . . . .[82]

> The complete abstinence from contact with women, by means of the body, word of mouth and the mind, as also with one's own wife, save immediately after the menstrual period, that is known as celibacy. The staunch application of the mind to the state of becoming the Brahman, O sage of severe penance! is celibacy . . . .[83]

In other passages, of course, celibacy itself is at a discount. The *Tantrics* have had little difficulty in stringing passages together to show that sexual practices are themselves a device for reining in the mind, for focussing it, for breaking through the confines of rationality. We are told in the *Yogashikhopanishad*, for instance, that

> Yoga is attained by the so-called *Jnana* only in the course of several

80 *Muktikopanishad*, II. 16-23.
81 *Chandogyopanishad*, VIII. 4.3; see all of VIII. 5.
82 *Prashnopanishad*, I. 13. 83 *Darshanopanishad*, I. 13, 14.

other incarnations, while *Jnana* of the genuine type is attained in the course of a single incarnation only, through *Yoga*. Hence there is no other royal road bestowing Liberation (through *Jnana* of the right type) beside Yoga, as it generates pure *Jnana* after shearing off the spurious character of so-called *Jnana*. . . .[84]

So one must become a *Yoga-siddha*. But how? Many methods—from *pranayama* on down—are prescribed. Here is one of them:

The Yogin who practises *Vajroli* proves to be the receptacle of all Yogic powers. Should he attain that, *Yoga-siddhi* is on the palm of his hand. He will know what has transpired and what is yet to take place. *Khechari* will also surely be in his reach. (*Vajroli* consists in plunging the glans penis in a bronze cup of cow's milk, drawing up the milk and dropping it and repeatedly practising it: then dropping the semen in the genital organ of the female and drawing it up with the Shonita discharged by her.)[85]

The sectarian Upanishads again

The sectarian Upanishads furnish as wide a variety of means as the other Upanishads. In three respects, however, they reflect the excrecences of the tradition in an unvarnished form. In them we find, first, an ever-increasing reliance on ritual. Second, anxious to enroll more and more adherents, they make things easier and easier for the aspirant so that even symbolic gestures, even symbolic observances, are now said to be sufficient to ensure emancipation. The third feature is one that we have already noticed in Chapter 4: just as there is the retailers' competition between sectarian deities so do we now find the same competition among the Upanishads in relation to the means; each Upanishad now promises more and more, each promises that by following *its* prescription often, that by following its prescription even in a symbolic manner—the aspirant will get all and more than what all the other Upanishads together promise.

It will be very worth our while to pause and look at some of the evidence regarding these three propositions for the evidence will bring us close to the process by which abstruse philosophical tenets enter popular consciousness in a vulgarized form, a process to which attention was drawn in Chapter I. The tradition reaches the apogee of abstraction in the Brahman. No sooner has it done so than it is forced to endow Him with person-like qualities. The tradition prescribes demanding devices for realizing the undefinable. No sooner has it done so than it has to prescribe empty rituals, and even, as we shall soon see, the merely symbolic observance of these symbolic rituals.

(*a*) *The increasing reliance on ritual.* Rituals and symbols which were mere aids in the principal Upanishads now come to swallow up all else, they become objects, they become ends in themselves.

[84]*Yogashikhopanishad*, I. 52-8.

The *Rudraksha mala* now comes to possess superhuman powers, it now becomes "the cause of firmness of all without exception," "the driver of evil spirits," "the dealer of death unto the delusion relating to the existence of the Universe which is apart from the Brahman," it comes to "assume the form of the Knowledge of Brahman," to "vouchsafe protection unto all the worlds through its omnipotence," to "sustain all the worlds," to "create all things," to "cause the prevalence of the day through the rising of the sun, of the night through the rising of the moon and the stars," it comes to "cause the multitudinous streams to flow along their wonted course," to "render travel from place to place safe, to cause travel from continent to continent, nay from one world to another safe."[86] First Brahman was potent, then Rudra, then the *mala* made from the tears of Rudra, now, in a passage the likes of which we will encounter often, the Upanishad recommending the *mala* to the aspirant itself comes to be potent:

> He who studies this Upanishad early in the morning, expiates the sins committed overnight. He who studies it at sunset, expiates the sins committed in the course of the day. By applying himself to it both in the morning and the evening the sinner becomes a sinless man. The *Mantra* recited as *Japa* with the aid of the rosary of *Aksha* beads, in the aforesaid manner, becomes efficacious at once. So says the Lord Guha unto Prajapati.[87]

Consider now the *Kalagnirudropanishad.* It warns the would-be teacher

> Should a knower of Brahman seek to impart instruction unto ignorant folk who are not eligible to receive it for want of proper training and the requisite purity of the mind and say, all at once, to the ignorant and the half-enlightened 'All this is Brahman,' he will soon find himself dragged down into the bottomless pit of hell by such a disciple; hence should he strive to purify the interior of such folk through adequate means; this done, knowledge of Brahman will dawn in their minds of its own accord; thence will they attain the end and aim of their life.[88]

And what are the "adequate means"?

> In this matter, the exclusive means to be adopted, conducive to the achievement of the end in view is the *Tripundra* alone.[89]

The potency that was assigned to, say, the *Rudrakshamala*, is now assigned to wearing an assortment of marks made with ashes. Only by wearing these marks, we are told, can the aspirant hope to succeed.

86 *Akshamalikopanishad, et passim.*
[illegible]

88 *Ibid.*, 16.
89 *Ibid.*, 2.

Through what means is the realization of the Pashupati attained? Thus asked Paippaladin again. Again he (Jabalin) replied unto him thus: 'Through the wearing of *Vibhuti* marks alone is it attained . . . .'[90]

There should be the mixing with the ashes (intended for putting on the mark) of water in a conch over which the *Mulamantra* (basic five-syllabled *Mantra* of Rudra) has been recited or of sandal-water (similarly sanctified with the uttering of the *Mulamantra*). One should smear his body with sandal, well-mixed with ashes. The pulverized ashes so treated verily bestow knowledge of the *Shivatattva* on the votary.[91]

Thereupon he brought the *Bhasma* (ashes) sanctified by the *Shatarudra-mantra* uttered over it, and added: 'This *Bhasma* is as efficacious as the *Bhasma* which was given by me of yore, wherewith even the sins resulting from the murder of a Brahmin and other heinous sins of the kind were atoned.' Having said so, Durvasa gave them the *Bhasma* possessed of excellent properties and added: 'Even from the words uttered by me all of you have become more radiant than before.' Then all the gods, with their bodies sprinkled over with ashes sanctified through the recitation of the *Shatarudra-mantra*, and with their sins completely washed off at that very moment, replied thus: 'O sage, from this moment onward do we come to realize this remarkable potency of *Bhasma* which is really wonderful.' 'Do thou listen to another wonderful potent property possessed by *Bhasma*. This *Bhasma* alone is possessed of the special virtue of bestowing the knowledge of Hari and Shankara, of destroying the most heinous sins resulting from the murder of Brahmins and the like, and of bestowing great power and glory.'[92]

Janaka, King of the Vedehas, then asked Yajnavalkya thus: 'What is the fruit derived from the wearing of the *Bhasma*-marks? He (the sage) replied thus: 'Only from this *Bhasmadharana* (i e , wearing *Bhasma* after attaining the firm conviction that all things apart from the Brahman are but *Bhasma* alone), there is liberation. Only from this *Bhasmadharana* does one attain identity with Shiva. He does not reincarnate again, he does not reincarnate again, who wears the *Bhasma*-mark. He becomes the radiance of the *Bhasma* . . . .'[93]

For Brahmins this wearing of *Bhasma* alone is the right kind of procedure; this alone is the right line of conduct. Without making the *Bhasma*-mark as indicated above, one should neither drink water nor eat food nor attend to any other task. After giving up the *Bhasma*-mark, through negligence, one should not recite the *Gayatri*-prayer, nor offer oblations unto the sacrificial fire, nor propitiate the Gods, the *Rishis*, the *Pitris* and

[90] *Jabalyupanishad*, 16, 17.,
[91] *Ibid.*, VI. 6-9.
[92] *Brihajjabalopanishad*, IV. 11, 12.
[93] *Ibid.*, [illegible]

the like. This alone is the time-honoured practice which is destructive of all sins and is the means of attaining liberation (from worldly existence). This is the perpetual line of conduct prescribed for being adopted by Brahmins. By not having recourse to this the Brahmin falls from his high status.[94]

Elaborate and rigid procedures are laid down about the cow-dung that has to be used for preparing the ashes, about the manner in which it has to be collected, about how it must be caught after it has left the cow but before it has reached the ground, about the ritual to be followed in preparing the ashes and so on. Two examples will have to suffice.

Rejecting the cow with hideous limbs, that which is made or prone to mischief, which bears inauspicious marks and the like, which has borne calves more than once, which has emaciated limbs, which has lost its calf, which is not gentle, which does not suckle its calf, which is barren, which has eaten its grass (and can eat on more), which is given to eating hair, rags and bones, which has just taken the bull, which has just then delivered or which is afflicted with disease, he should get hold of the dung of an unexceptionably flawless cow of a superior breed and colour. Cow-dung (dropped by such a cow) even while in the act of falling, should be got hold of (by way of preference); in the alternative, not rejecting that which drops over an auspicious place, one should knead it well with the urine and other products of the cow. In the matter of gathering of the dung a tawny-coloured or a pure white cow should preferably be chosen; in its absence, any other cow, not subject to the defects mentioned above, should be chosen for the purpose. The ashes obtained from the dung of tawny-coloured and other flawless cows is spoken of highly as the best. It is only with the ashes obtained from cow-dung, gathered in the aforesaid manner from flawless cows, that the body should be smeared. Ashes prepared from cow-dung found and gathered promiscuously from any place, should not be smeared, nor should ashes prepared without purification in the prescribed manner.[95]

After causing the cow to rise up, should it be lying down, even with effort, he should collect its urine, all the while uttering the *Gayatri*, and keep it in a vessel made of gold, silver, copper or earth; or in the absence of these, either in a lotus or *Prajasha* leaf, or even in the horn of a cow; then uttering the *Mantra*, '*Gandhadvaaraam duraaddharshaam nityapushtham karishinim*' and so on, the house-holder should receive the cow-dung in a clean vessel (made of gold or other material as aforesaid), even before it reaches the ground. The wise man should then purify the cow-dung by uttering the *Mantra*, '*Shrir me bhajatu, alakshmir me nashyatu*' and so on, taking care to see that the cow-dung is devoid of any grains of corn. Then

94 *Bhasmajabalopanishad*, 8. 95 *Brihajjabalopanishad*, III. 2

should he pour the urine into the cow-dung with the Mantra, '*Sam tva sinchami*' and so on; then with the *Mantra*, '*Panchaanaam tvaa vaataanaam yantraaya dhartaaya grinhaami*' and so on, he should make fourteen balls out of the cow-dung and, drying them up and purifying them with the rays of the sun, he should gather them thereafter.... Then should he place the dried cow-dung balls in the vessel aforesaid and, having kindled the domestic sacred fire in the manner prescribed in the *Grhyasutras* adopted by his progenitors, he should worship the fire and throw the balls as oblations unto it, uttering the *Pranava* both before and after each separate syllable of the six-syllabled *Sukta* respectively presided over by the *Panchabrahmans* and the *Parabrahman* as deities, with the word '*Svaha*' added at the end of each.[96]

Equally elaborate procedures are laid down about the parts of the body on which the marks are to be applied, the ritual that has to be followed (*e.g.*, the *Mantras* that have to be recited) while applying the marks and so on. In addition, of course, there are all manner of assertions about what each of the marks is supposed to signify, about what its "true import" is.

The Vaishnavas lay equal store by their *Urdhva-pundra* marks made with the *chandan* grown in the forests of *Vaikuntha* "which is of pale yellow colour and is the means of attaining liberation".[97]

Then, after making salutation unto *Gopi-chandana* and securing it (from the *Chakra-tirtha*), one should utter the following *Mantra*-s: 'O-*Gopi-chandana*! that destroyest sin, that art generated out of the body of Vishnu, that art marked with the impression of the *Chakra*, my salutation unto thee. Vouchsafe unto me the bestowal of liberation, through my wearing thy mark (on my body)....'[98]

The *Yogin*-ascetic (always aiming at what lies higher and higher) attains the highest state by adopting the four upward tending courses, *viz.* with his staff pointing upwards (in the direction of the *Vishna* and thence onward upto the *Avikalpa*) with his semen tending in the upward direction (through confirmed celibacy), with the *Urdhva-pundra* (pointing upwards and placed over the prescribed places) and by practising the upward Yogic path. Knowledge based on this firm conviction is attained of its own accord (by the *Yogin*) through real devotion unto me. By making the *Gopichandana* mark every day in the prescribed manner, the one-pointed devotion unto me will be developed thoroughly (by him). What is said herein is undoubtedly the truth. The (wearing of the) *Urdhva-pundra* (perpendicular mark), with *Gopi-chandana* mixed with water, has been prescribed as a course beyond which there is nothing better for all Brahmins pursuing the course of life prescribed by the Vedas.[99]

[96] *Ibid.*, III. 5-31.
[97] *Vasudevopanishad*, 2.
[98] *Ibid.*, 3-4.
[99] *Ibid.*, 19-25.

Along with the *malas*, marks and *Mantras* come elaborate *yantras*, (diagrams), for each of which the Upanishad contain elaborate directions about the pattern that has to be drawn, the sequence in which different parts of it are to be drawn, the ritual that has to be followed in drawing each part, the import of each pa·t and of the *yantra* as a whole. To get an idea of the length to which these elaborate intricacies are taken, the reader should glance, for instance, through the *Rama-Tapinyupanishad* or the *Ramarahasyopanishad.*

There is no end to the variety of such rituals and observances. Soon enough, even the rituals are pushed aside. The sectarians are now clamouring for adherents; membership drives, recruitment drives have now taken over. So that soon enough what matters is not that the aspirant should *attain liberation* by wearing the *Tripundra* mark, what matters is merely that he should *wear it*. Thus

(*b*) *Even symbolic gestures come to be efficacious*. The mere utterance of a name, of a *Mantra*, the mere fact of dying in a particular city, the mere worshipping of a particular image, the mere residence in a particular city, the mere remembrance of a formula, the mere looking at a *mala*, the mere act of breathing in and breathing out, the mere looking at an *avadhuta*, the mere coming within the sight of a knower, is now sufficient to ensure the liberating knowledge.

Here are a few examples from the Vaishnava Upanishads.

> Those that worship those images overcome death, attain liberation and get across the miseries of the character of foetal existence, birth, dotage, death, and the three kinds of torments relating to the Atman, the presiding deities, and the elements.[100]

> One should meditate upon what is my favourite image. On doing so, he will attain the state of *Kaivalya*, (remaining as the *Paramatman* alone). He will stand liberated. Unto him verily I will yield my Atman [101]

> The Lord Narayana replied unto him thus: 'even as there are seven sacred cities, all of them capable of bestowing as fruits the gratification of one's desires, even so, on this terrestrial sphere there are the seven sacred cities, Ayodhya, Mathura, Maya, Kanchi, Kashi, Avantika and Dvaraka, which are capable of bestowing liberation or otherwise. Among these, Mathura, the city of Gopala, is the actual Brahman. This city is the bestower of the heart's desires or otherwise of all the celestials and all other beings, (according to the degree of their spiritual development). Residence therein is (tantamount to) the worship of the Brahman.[102]

[100] *Gopala-Tapinyupanishad*, *Gopalottara-Tapini*, 25-29.
[101] *Ibid.*, *Gopalottara-Tapini*, 46-61.
[102] *Ibid.*, *Gopalottara-Tapini*, 19-20.

At the end of the *Dvapara* (*yuga*), Narada approached Brahma, (the creator), and (asked him) thus: 'Wandering as I do over the face of the earth, how may I, O Lord! cross over (by overcoming the evil effects of) the *Kali*-age?' The reputed Lord Brahma then made reply thus: 'Well have I been questioned thus (by thee). Do thou listen to that profound secret (whose import) is endorsed by all the Veda-s and which is worthy of being preserved (from being profaned by the uninitiated), through the aid of which thou wilt pass (unscathed) through the course of worldly existence in the *Kali*-age. Through the mere utterance of the name of the foremost *Purusha*, the Lord Narayana, one is shaken off (the evil effects of) the *Kali*-age. This then is the secret. Narada further questioned (Brahman) thus: 'What is that name, O Lord?' The reputed *Hiranyagarbha* replied thus: '*Hare, Rama, Hare, Rama, Rama, Rama, Hare, Hare, Hare, Krishna, Hare, Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, Hare, Hare.*' This (collection) of sixteen names is destructive of the baneful influences of *Kali*, (even if muttered once).[103]

'*Om*' is the first syllable. '*Aim*' is the second. '*Krom*' is the third. '*Klim*,' is the fourth: '*Klum*' is the fifth. '*Hram*' is the sixth. '*Hrim*' is the seventh. '*Hrum*' is the eighth. '*Sauh*' is the ninth. (The five syllables constituting the word) '*Dattatreyaya*' (when added) make up fourteen in all. (The word) '*Svaha*' (completes) the sixteen (syllables) . . . Whoever mutters that, attains the form of Vishnu . . .[104]

Thereupon Ishvara asked Sri-Rama of the character of existence, sentience and bliss thus: 'In this sacred spot, Kashi, hallowed unto me, should any embodied mortal die, either at the *Manikarnikaghat* or elsewhere on the banks of Ganges, I seek the liberation of that being and no other boon, at thy hands.' Unto him the reputed Sri-Rama replied thus: 'O Lord of the gods, in this spot hallowed unto thee, those that die, at whichever part it may be, even if they should be worms, insects and the like, may they become liberated (as desired by thee), and not otherwise. In this *Avimukta*, this hallowed spot of thine, I shall be ever present, immanent in stones, images and the like, for accomplishing the liberation of all beings dying therein. O Shiva, whoever worships me with true devotion and with this *Mantra*, in this sacred spot, him shall I release from the sin of killing Brahmins and the like. There need be no anguish on thy part on that account. Whoever receive the six-syllabled *Mantra* of mine at thy hands or at the hands of Brahman, while alive in this world, will attain the realization of the *Mantra* and when they pass away will obtain release and reach me. Shouldst thou, of thy own accord, utter as *Upadesha* my *Mantra* in the right ear of anyone whatsoever, who is at the point of death, that person will surely stand liberated from phenomenal existence.' Thus was spoken by Sri-Ramachandara (unto Shiva).[105]

[103] *Kali-Samataranopanishad*, 1, 2.
[104] *Dattatreyopanishad*, I, 6.
[105] *Rama-Tapinyupanishad*, *Uttara-Tapini*, III 11-16.

Whatever deliberate sin of the aforesaid kinds is capable of being committed by one in the three states (of waking, dreaming and sleeping), such sin will be completely expiated by the mere remembrance of this formula. Whatever deliberate sin of the aforesaid kinds is capable of being committed by one in the three states (of waking, dreaming and sleeping), all such sin, which is at the root of bondage, will stand destroyed, on the imparting of this formula (to the sinner).[106]

And here are a few equally representative passages from the *Shaiva* Upanishads.

He who is incapable of practising in the aforesaid manner, but only studies this Upanishad, becomes (in the manner described herein) the Brahman alone, shining at the topmost part of the *Pranava* as the *Turiya*, the one absolute existence. *Om* this is the truth. . . .[107]

He who has reached beyond the first three stages in life, *viz.* of being a celibate, a householder and a recluse and renounced the phenomenal world and become a *Sannyasin*, should utter this *Satarudriya* as *Japa*, either always or once for all. Through such uttering the practitioner will attain the knowledge of the Brahman alone, in the attitude 'I am the Brahman alone,' which has the power of drying up the ocean of wordly existence.[108]

By that Brahmana (knower of the Brahman) by whom the *Tripundra*-mark is worn over the head, will be attained the fruit of having studied all that has to be studied, of hearing (from the mouth of the Guru) all that has to be heard and of practising all that has to be practised. He who has given up his class by birth (*varna*), stage in life (*ashrama*) and conformity to the rules of conduct (*achara*) prescribed in the *Dharmashastras*, who has abandoned all austerities enjoined on him by the Veda and the *Shastra*, even he will become venerable through his wearing, even once, the three transverse lines of the *Tripundra*-mark.[109]

Should there be non-performance of this through negligence, the delinquent is absolved (from the resultant sin) on uttering the *Gayatri* a thousand and eight times, standing in the middle of a water-course and fasting for a single day (thereafter). An ascetic who has neglected this most important duty of his is absolved (from the resultant sin) by fasting for a day and uttering the *Pranava* twelve thousand times. Otherwise, Indra will cause these defaulting ascetics to be thrown unto the fierce wolves.[110]

[106] *Ibid., Uttara-Tapini*, V. 6-34.

[107] *Kalagnirudropanishad*, 10.

[108] *Kaivalyopanishad*, 25-26.

[109] *Brihajjabalopanishad*, V. 8, 9.

[110] *Bhasmajabalopanishad*, 9.

By bathing me with a hundred *Mahaprastha*-s of unbroken rice, one who desires to attain the lunar region attains the lunar region. By bathing me with the same quantity of sesamum-seeds, he who desires to reach the *Vayuloka*, reaches the *Vayuloka*. By bathing me with as much of black gram, he who is desirous of reaching the *Varunaloka*, attains the *Varunaloka*. By bathing me with as much of barley, he who desires to reach the solar world, reaches the solar world. By bathing me with the same grain measuring double the aforesaid quantity, he who is desirous of reaching *Svarga*, reaches the *Svargaloka*. By bathing me with the same grain, measuring four times the aforesaid quantity, he who desires to reach the *Brahmaloka*, reaches the *Brahmaloka*. By bathing me with the same grain, measuring one hundred times the aforesaid quantity, one reaches the fourfold sheath of the Brahman. . . .[111]

By being worn by the devotee (of Rudra), it (the *Rudraksha-mala*) will remove all sins committed by day and night. By looking at it religious merit will be attained a hundred-thousand-fold, and by wearing it ten-thousand-fold. By wearing it a man will attain a hundred-crores of units of religious merit. By uttering prayers (as *japa*) with its help and by wearing the *Rudraksha*, a man will attain religious merit to the tune of a lakh of crores of thousands, and a lakh of crores of hundreds, respectively. . . .[112]

Should the *Rudraksha* of such exalted origin form the topic of conversation anywhere, he who discourses about it attains the fruit attainable through the gift of ten cows. That person alone is the radiance of the *Bhasma* as well as the *Rudraksha*. Thus, by merely touching the reputed *Rudraksha* with the hands and wearing it, there will be attained the fruit attainable from the gift of two thousand cows. Should the reputed *Rudraksha* be worn (as ear-ornaments) on the ears, the fruit attainable from the gift of eleven thousand cows will be attained. The wearer attains the state of the eleven Rudra-s also. Should the reputed *Rudraksha* be worn over the head, the fruit attainable from the gift of a crore of cows will be attained by the wearer. It is impossible to utter into one's ears the fruit attainable by wearing the *Rudraksha* over these places. . . .[113]

Excrecences of this kind occur more frequently in the sectarian Upanishads, but they are by no means confined to them. Dying, in *Kashi* for instance, is equally efficacious in *Pranagnihotropanishad* (23) and the *Muktikopanishad* (18-25), both *Samanya-Vedanta* Upanishads. Similarly, to take the *Yoga*-Upanishads, numerous passages promise extravagant rewards for merely symbolic gestures. Three illustrative ones will have to suffice.

The vital air goes out with the sound of '*ha*' and again enters with the

[111]*Ibid.*, II. 25. [112]*Rudrakshajabalopanishad*, 6-7. [113]*Ibid*. 46-48

sound of '*sa*' The *Jiva* always recites as *japa* this *Mantra*, viz. '*Hamsa, Hamsa.*' Twenty-one thousand six hundred times in the course of a day and night does the *Jiva* silently recite as *japa* the *Mantra* always. This *Gayatri* known as *Ajapa* bestows liberation always on *Yogins*. By the very resolve taken, for doing this, a man is rid of his sins. The like of this lore, the like of this prayer, the like of this virtuous act there has not been and there never shall be.[114]

Thus, this accomplished *Yogin* ever intent on the drinking of the nectar of the Brahman, resulting out of the practice of *Nirvikalpa samadhi* for a long time, becomes a *Paramahamsa*, known as *Avadhuta*. By having a look at him all the world is sanctified. Even an ignorant man intent on the service of that *Avadhuta* becomes liberated. That *Avadhuta* causes one hundred and one generations of his family to cross the ocean of worldly existence. The entire class consisting of his mother, father, wife and progeny becomes liberated.[115]

All that fall within the range of his vision are released from all sins. All that traverse the ethereal, as well as the terrestrial regions, falling within the range of vision of the knower of the Brahman, are (in virtue of the greatness of his religious merit) that very moment released from sins, accumulated through crores of previous incarnations.[116]

Is it surprising then that to this day people think it a great boon that they have merely seen or been seen by the one they think is a *Brahmajnani*?

(c) *The retailers' competition among the Upanishadic seers*. Hawking its particular deity, its particular prescription, one Upanishad after another starts promising that were the aspirant to follow its teaching all of what is promised by all the other Upanishads and much more will be his.

Here are some *Shaivite* claims:

Whichever Brahmin, who treads along the path of the attainment of the Brahman merely studies without understanding its import the *Atharva-siras* seeking release from the bonds of *Pashu-pasha* (the emancipation of the *Jivatman* from the delusion relating to the existence of things apart from the Brahman), he becomes hallowed (by fire); he becomes hallowed by (air); he becomes hallowed by the (sun); he becomes hallowed by the (moon); he becomes hallowed (by the real existence); he becomes hallowed (by the all); he attains the religious merit of having performed ablutions in all the three and a half crores of sacred waters; he derives the fruits of having studied all the Veda-s; he attains the fruit of having observed all the vows and austerities enjoined by all the Veda-s; he becomes known unto all the celestials; he attains the fruit of having per-

[114] *Dhayanabindupanishad*, 61-5; *Yogachudamanyupanishad*, 31-6 is similar.
[115] *Mandalabrahmanopanishad*, V. 9.
[116] *Varahopanishad*, IV. 2. 43-44.

formed all the sacrifices and observances prescribed for one of his class and stage in life. By him will be attained the fruit of having recited all the *Itihas*, *Purana*-s, and *Rudra*-s, a hundred-thousand times. He attains the fruit of having recited the *Gayatri* a hundred-thousand times. He attains the fruit of having recited the *Pranava* ten thousand times. Every time that he memorizes this *Grantha*, he sanctifies ten generations of his progenitors; he sanctifies ten generations of his progeny and rows of diners falling in the range of his vision. Thus spake the most exalted *Atharvasiras*. Having recited this once, he becomes pure and cleansed and attains the merit of the performance of all austerities; having recited it for a second time he acquires *Ganapatya* (the merit of worshipping Ganapati), having recited it thrice he attains *Sayujya* or *Kaivalya* with that God. *Om Satyam* (This is verily the truth).[117]

'That knower who practises with ashes in conformity with the rule relating to the *Tripundra* mark after receiving instructions from the mouth of his Guru, be he a celibate, householder, recluse, or mendicant (following the rules prescribed for his stage in life), becomes hallowed from the effects of heinous ordinary sins. He becomes one who has had ablutions in all the sacred waters (three and a half crores in number) even without resorting to them. He attains the fruit of having studied all the four Veda-s (to wit, a perfectly pure mind). He becomes one who has come to know all the *Deva*-s. He becomes the reciter of all the Rudra-*mantra*-s in perpetuity. He attains the secondary fruit of having enjoyed all enjoyments of this as well as the other world. He attains the principal fruit of giving up his body and attaining *Shivasayujya* (communion with Shiva, *viz.* the transcendent fruit of the incorporeal state of *Kaivalya*). He does not return again, he does not return again. So said the lord Kalagnirudra unto Sanatkumara.[118]

He (the seeker who has not had the actual direct perception of the Brahman) who studies the *Satarudriya* (the chapter on Rudra) daily, as far as it lies in his power (or at least the *Pancharudriya*) becomes hallowed, like fire (the chief factor in the performance of ritua's enjoined in the *Shruti*-s and the *Smriti*-s), from the sin of stealing gold, is hallowed from the sin of drinking spirituous liquor; is hallowed from the sin of the slaughter of a Brahmin; is hallowed from the sin of omission of performing austerities prescribed by the *Shastra*-s and the sin of commission of performing austerities not having the sanction of the *Shastra*-s. From such study he derives the fruit of resorting to the *Avimukta*.[119]

117 *Atharvasiropanishad*, 68.
118 *Kalagnirudropanishad*, 9; the *Jabalyupanishad* (22-3) claims each of these for itself.
119 *Kaivalyopanishad*, 25-6.

The Vaishnavas claim no less for their Upanishads. All the Upanishads proclaim that by following their advice the aspirant will attain the highest goal, they do so even though the rituals etc., they prescribe differ greatly. It would seem that Brahman can be attained merely by rituals; not just that, it would seem that He can be attained by a very wide variety of rituals.

> He who studies this lore, studies all the Veda-s. He performs all the various kinds of sacrifices, by going through all the requisite observances prescribed therefore. He takes his ablutions in all the (three and a half crores of) sacred waters. He is rid of all kinds of sins, great and small. He shall attain the exquisite radiance of the Brahman. He sanctifies his ancestors, from Brahman downwards, as well as the progeny springing from his race, through the course of *Kalpa*-s (eons) as long as they last. Epilepsy and other incurable diseases would not afflict him. Sinners as well as the *Yaksha*-s, the manes of departed ancestors and evil spirits, should they only touch him, see him or hear him, will attain the worlds attainable by the righteous. At the mere thought of his, all the ends and aims in life will be successfully achieved (by him). Everyone will think of him, as he would of his own father. Even kings will carry out his mandates.[123]

> The self-same Lord pervades the interior of the Universe. He is again of an all-embracing character. He alone is worthy of being meditated upon by seekers after liberation. He alone is the bestower of liberation. By remembering him, one is released from all his sins. By repeatedly muttering his name, one attains identity with Vishnu. Whoever studies this (Upanishad) by day, destroys all sins committed by him at night. Whoever studies(it) by night, destroys all the sins committed by him during the day. This is verily the secret (underlying) all the Veda-s. This again is the secret (underlying) all the Upanishads. He who studies this, attains the fruit of all the sacrifices, attains mental tranquillity, attains purity of mind, attains the fruit of bathing in all the (three and a half crores of) sacred waters. He who knows thus, is liberated from the bondage of the body.[124]

> Without true devotion to Vishnu there is not even the remotest possibility of attaining liberation for any, even after the lapse of crores of *Kalpas* (eons).[125]

> Whoever studies this daily, becomes hallowed through the influence of air, fire, the moon, the sun, Brahma, Vishnu, and Rudra, attains the fruit of having muttered the *Gayatri* a hundred-thousand times, attains the fruit of having muttered the *Maharudra*, a hundred-thousand times,

[123] *Avyaktopanishad*, VII. 1.
[124] *Tripad-Vibhuti-Maha-Narayanopanishad*, ...
[125] *Krishnopanishad*, ...

attains the fruit of having muttered the *Pranava* ten thousand crores of times, sanctifies a hundred generations of his progenitors and a hundred generations of his progeny. He becomes the sanctifier of the rows of diners (among whom he is present), is released from the sins of having slaughtered Brahmins and the like, is released from the sins of having slaughtered cows and the like, is purified from the sin of having received as a gift a man's weight of gold and precious jewels and the like and the sin of having drunk water at a place where it is stored for way-worn travellers, is released from all sins, (not leaving even a single one to remain unwashed), is released from the sins of having partaken of prohibited food and the like, and in fact reaches the other side of (the ocean of) proficiency in all mystic and *yogic* lore. He alone is (a *Jivan-mukta*, the true Brahmin), and becomes devoted to the Brahman.[126]

He who practises in this manner every day this king of formulas, the *Anustubh* in praise of *Nrisimha*, (so that he could invoke to his presence *Nrisimha*, the highest import of all the Veda-s, *Shastra*-s, *Purana*-s etc.) he learns *Rig-veda*, he learns *Yajur-veda*, he learns *Sama-veda*, he learns *Atharva veda*, he learns *Atharvangiras*, he learns *Shakha*-s (of Veda-s), he learns the *Purana*-s, he learns the *Kalpa-shastra*-s, he learns the *Gatha*-s Hymns, he learns *Narasamsi*-Hymns, he learns the *Pranava*. He who studies the *Pranava*, verily learns all, he verily learns all.[127]

He who always mutters this King of *Mantra*-s, the six-syllabled one in praise of Sri-Ramachandra becomes hallowed by fire, he becomes hallowed by air, he becomes hallowed by the sun, he becomes hallowed by the moon, he becomes hallowed by Brahma, he becomes hallowed by the Lord Vishnu, he becomes hallowed by Rudra, he becomes known unto all the gods, he becomes one who has performed and attained the fruits of all kinds of sacrifices; the fruits derived from reciting the *Itihas*, the *Purana*-s and the *Rudra*-s a hundred-thousand times are attained by him; by recalling to mind the *Mantra* in praise of Sri-Ramachandra, the fruits derived from muttering the *Gayatri* a hundred-thousand times, are attained by him; he becomes one who has muttered the *Pranava* ten thousand crores of times; he sanctifies ten prior and ten posterior generations (of his ancestors and progeny). He becomes one who sanctifies the entire row of persons among whom he sits for dinner; he becomes really great; he also attains immortality.[128]

Once again we must not forget that while this competitive advertisement of the prescribed means is most intense in the sectarian Upanishads, it is

[126] *Dattatreyopanishad*, III. 1.
[127] *Nrisimha-Tapanyopanishad*, *Purva-Tapini*, V. 11-15.
[128] *Rama-Tapanyopanishad*, *Uttara-Tapini*, V. 1-5. *Vasudevopanishad* (26, 27) claims

not confined to them.[129] Here is the *Kathopanishad* promising that if one merely recites its doctrine in an assembly of Brahmins one will attain immortality:

> If one recites this supreme secret
> In an assembly of Brahmins,
> Or at a time of the ceremony for the dead, devoutly—
> That makes for immortality!
> That makes for immortality![130]

And here is Krishna in the Gita itself asserting that should one so much as hear His teaching he 'shall attain to the happy worlds of the righteous':

> He who with supreme devotion to Me will teach this Supreme Secret to My devotees, shall doubtless come to Me. Nor is there any among men who does greater service to Me than he; nor shall there be another on earth dearer to Me than he. . . .And the man also who hears, full of faith and free from malice even he, liberated, shall attain to the happy worlds of the righteous.[131]

Attributes and Practices Recommended by Several Upanishads.

Whatever devices one chooses for stilling the mind, for overcoming desires, for annihilating the ego, the Upanishads tell us that to use them effectively one must cultivate many of the more conventional virtues.

The aspirant's conduct must be good, he must be tranquil, peaceful, composed; he must be mindful, pure and understanding.[132] He must be undistracted; he must live by truth, austerity, proper knowledge and *Brahmacharya*;[133] by charity, truth, faith;[134] "one should attain (Brahman) by recourse to the six means of truthfulness, charity, austerity, fasting (of mind and body), and complete indifference to worldly objects. One should also attend to the following three: self-control, charity, and compassion. . . ."; one must cultivate innocence, non-attachment, silence, learning, non-observance of conventions regarding stages of life and caste, fearlessness, equanimity; one must take to vigorous study, discipline, devoted service of those who know.[135] One must renounce: "on whatever day he has the spirit of renunciation, that very day let him renounce (and become a recluse)."[136]

[129]To take just a few examples from the *Samanya-Vedanta* and the *Yoga* Upanishads, *Mahopanishad*, VI. 83; *Shuka-Rahasyopanishad*, 11-99; *Suryopanishad*, 8; *Tejo-Bindupanishad*, VI. 108-110; *Dhyanabindupanishad*, 1; *Pashupatabrahmopanishad*, *Purva-Kanda*, 17. 31; *Yogashikhopanishad*, I. 52-8, VI. 41-6; *Varahopanishad*, III. 11-13, put forth similar claims for the particular means they prescribe—the means for which these claims are made range from *dhyanayoga*, *Brahma yagya*, investigation of the middle *nadi*, worshipping at Hari's feet to a vast variety of others.

[130]*Kathopanishad*, 3. 17.

[131]*Bhagvad Gita*, 18. 68, 69, 71.

[132]*Kathopanishad*, II. 24, III. 7, IV. 14, 15.

[133]*Mundakopanishad*, II. 2-4, III. 1-5.

[134]*Prashnopanishad*, I. 2, 15, 16.

[135]*Subalopanishad*, III. 1, XI, XIII.

[136]*Jabalopanishad*, ...

The ten *yamas* (non-violence, truth, abstinence from stealing, celibacy, compassion, rectitude, forbearance, fortitude, temperance in food and cleanliness) and the ten *niyamas* (penance, contentment, belief in the existence of the Supreme Being, munificence, the adoration of Hari or the all-pervading Vishnu, the study of the Vedanta, modesty, determination, silent prayer and austerity) are often commended.[137]

As we would expect from our earlier discussion the import of each of these words—when they are explained—is not the same, just as the list of attributes to be cultivated is not the same.

The list of *yamas* and *niyamas* given above, for instance, is taken from the *Trisikhobrahmanopanishad*, 32-33. In a passage that was cited above, the *Darshanopanishad* (I.13, 14) defines celibacy thus: "The complete abstinence from contact with women, by means of the body, word of mouth and the mind, as also with one's own wife, *save immediately after the menstrual period*, that is known as celibacy. The staunch application of the mind to the state of becoming the Brahman, O sage of severe penance! is celibacy"; the *Sandilyopanishad* (I.1.4-14), on the other hand, says: "The giving up of sexual intercourse, *in all states and at all places*, by thought, word and deed, is what is termed celibacy." Manu (3.50) gives a third version: "He who avoids women *on the six forbidden nights*," he says, "and *on eight others* is (equal in chastity to) a student, in whatever order he may live." The former (II.7) defines *Astikya* (belief in the existence of the Supreme) as "faith in the *Shruti* and *Smriti*" while the latter (II. 1-11) describes it as "right belief in the lines of Dharma and Adharma as laid down by the Veda-s." *Ishvara-pujana* is described in the *Sandilyopanishad* (II.1-11) as "The worship of Vishnu, Rudra and other deities, as far as resources would permit with a cheerful disposition, and in the *Darshanopanishad* (II.8) it is taken as "A heart free from passions, speech not rendered bad by falsehood and the like, action devoid of violence."

The list of desirable practices and attributes that need to be cultivated can be extended many times over. I shall leave the preparation of a more comprehensive and systematic list as an exercise for the reader and instead draw attention to two requirements that are often mentioned and that have a bearing on what I will have to say in Chapters 7 and 10. These two requirements are faith and grace.

The Upanishads tell us again and again that faith in and devotion for the doctrine, the deity, the *guru*, the rituals being followed are of paramount importance.

> To one who has the highest devotion for God,
> And for his spiritual teacher even as for God,
> To him these matters which have been declared
> Become manifest (if he be) a great soul——
> Yea, become manifest (if he be) a great soul![138]

[137] For instance, *Trishikhobrahmanopanishad*, 32-33.
[138] *Shvetashvataropanishad*, VI. 23.

There is, however, a certain matter (fit to be considered in this connection.) (That is), for all persons, whether possessed of the requisite qualifications or not possessed of such, *Bhakti yoga* is eminently fit to be practised. *Bhakti-yoga* does not involve any hardship. From *Bhakti-yoga* is attained liberation. For persons who are truly devoted, the attainment of the realization of the eternal truth (of the Brahman) is possible without much effort and within a short time. (Should it be asked), how can that be, (the answer is), (*Shrimannarayana*), who shows fatherly affection towards his devotees, protects, of his own accord, all who are constant in their devotion to him from (the evil influences operating in the form of obstacles to liberation), bestows on them, (his devotees), all their heart's desires and causes liberation to be bestowed on the four-faced Brahma and other *Jiva*-s, (that are true devotees of his). Without true devotion to Vishnu, there is not even the remotest possibility of attaining liberation for any, even after the lapse of crores of *Kalpa*-s (eons). Without the cause, no effect could be brought about. Without true devotion, the realization of the Brahman can never be achieved. Hence, do thou also resort to devotion, do thou also resort to devotion, giving up all other expedients. Do thou become firmly attached to devotion. Through devotion all psychic and other miraculous powers are accomplished. There is nothing that cannot be achieved through devotion.[139]

The *Gita*, as is well known, extols faith and devotion again and again.

> It is the man of faith who gains knowledge—the man who is intent on it and who has mastery over his senses; having gained knowledge, he comes ere long to the supreme peace.
>
> But the man of doubt, without knowledge and without faith, is lost; for him who is given to doubt there is neither this world nor that beyond, nor happiness.[140]

> The *yogin* is deemed higher than the man of austerities; he is deemed also higher than the man of knowledge; higher is he than the man engrossed in ritual; therefore be thou a *yogin*, O Arjuna!
>
> And among all *yogins*, he who worships Me with faith, his inmost self all rapt in Me, is deemed by Me to be the best *yogin*.[141]

> For this My divine delusive mystery made up of the three *guna-s* is hard to pierce; but those who make Me their sole refuge pierce the veil.
>
> But those virtuous men whose sin has come to an end, freed from the delusion of the pairs of opposites, worship Me in steadfast faith.[142]
>
> This Supreme Being, O Partha, may be won by undivided devotion; in It all beings dwell, by It all is pervaded.[143]

[139] *Tripad-Vibhuti-Maha-Narayanopanishad*, II. VIII. 11, 12.
[140] *Bhagvad Gita*, IV. 39, 40.
[141] *Ibid.*, VI. 46, 47.
[142] *Ibid.*, VII. 14, 28.
[143] *Ibid.*, VIII. 22.

I am the same to all beings; with Me there is none disfavoured, none favoured; but those who worship Me with devotion are in Me and I in them.[144]

To these, ever in tune with Me worshipping Me with affectionate devotion, I give the power of selfless action, whereby they come to Me.[145]

Not by the study of the Veda-s, not by sacrifice, not by the study of other scriptures, not by gifts, nor yet by performance of rites or of fierce austerities can I, in such a form, be seen by any one save thee in the world of men, O Kurupravira!

Not by the Veda-s, not by penance, nor by any gifts, nor yet by sacrifice, can any behold Me in the Form that thou hast seen.

But by single-minded devotion, O Arjuna, I may in this Form be known and seen, and truly entered into, O Parantapa![146]

By devotion he realizes in truth how great I am, who I am; and having known Me in reality he enters into Me.[147]

We shall see later how this "faith" becomes blind faith, how it becomes a basis for suspending doubt, for suspending inquiry, for suspending reason itself.

But nothing will avail one, no amount of ritual, study, austerity, devotion, effort, what have you, till one has the grace of the Absolute, the deity, the *guru*.

This Soul is not to be obtained by instruction,
Nor by intellect, nor by much learning.
He is to be obtained only by the one whom He chooses;
To such a one that Soul reveals His own person.[148]

More minute than the minute, greater than the great,
Is the Soul that is set in the heart of a creature here.
One who is without the active will beholds Him, and becomes freed from sorrow—
When through the grace of the Creator he beholds the greatness of the Soul.[149]

O immortal Rudra, may we drink the *Soma*-juice, due to Thy grace.
May we become immortal through the performance of the *Soma*-sacri-
fice. May we attain thy radiance, after giving up unto thee the fruits of
our sacrifices and other austerities, through the knowledge attainable
only through the purification of our minds, as the result of Thy grace,

[144] *Ibid.*, IX. 29. [145] *Ibid.*, X. 10. [146] *Ibid.*, 48, 53, 54. [147] *Ibid.*, XVIII. 55.
[148] *Mundakopanishad*, III. 2. 3; *Kathopanishad*, II. 23 is similar.
[149] *Kathopanishad*, II. 20; *Shvetashvataropanishad*, III. 20 is similar.

and by assuming the attitude, 'I am that radiance alone.' Further, may we realize, in our own Atman, the radiant gods, that stand in no way differentiated from the Brahman, *viz.* this *Viraj*, the *Sutra*, the *Bija* and the *Turiyatman*, or Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheshvara, all due to our having realized thy real form in the attitude, 'I alone am all these.' What shall the foe of the form of the obstacles to the attainment of thy state, *viz.*, lust, anger, greed, infatuation, delusion and spite, or of the form of the ignorance of the Atman do unto us, who have been vouchsafed the 'fear-not' boon by thee? Verily, when this enemy of ours is thus incapable of assailing us and dislodging us from our position, what can the disturbing influence of the vicious deed of a mortal do as, at the very moment of the dawning of real knowledge through Thy grace, even the doer of vicious deeds will have attained the state of the Brahman; as 'religious merit as well as sin is alike the absolute sentience of the Brahman alone,' as the *Shruti* says.[150]

He, who looks upon all things as the non-differentiated absolute sentience, he alone is actually the man of perfect knowledge; he is Shiva; he is Hari; he is Brahma (the Creator). Without the grace of the great and good Guru, the giving up of the desire for the enjoyment of objects of sensual pleasure is difficult of attainment; difficult, indeed is the realization of the truth (of the Atman); and difficult likewise is the attainment of co-existence, (the state of aloneness with the Brahman).[151]

We shall see later how this emphasis on faith and grace is eminently serviceable to the ideologists of the tradition. What if I do everything that has been prescribed and still do not obtain the promised results? Surely, says the ideologist, it must be that you do not have the requisite faith. But how do you know that? Simply because if you had the faith you would surely have reaped the promised outcome Why am I denied the Lord's grace? Must be your past *Karma*. But how do you know that? Simply because if it had not been for your adverse outstanding balance in the *Karma*-ledger, you'd surely have had His grace.

In the minds of the faithful, of those who have internalized the world-view, of those who have successfully hypnotized themselves, circularities of this kind are impregnable.

We shall see in Chapters 9 and 10 how this emphasis on faith in the

[150] *Atharvasiropanishad*, 41-44.

[151] *Mahopanishad*, IV, 76-82. The passage quoted in the text represents the typical position. As one can expect, it is not difficult to locate an isolated passage conveying a contrary meaning. For instance, the same Upanishad tells us "By giving up considering everything as part of one's own self, one attains liberation. Fie upon that despicable human worm, in whose case the blissful perception, resulting from the giving up of the objects of his own desire, has become difficult of attainment, though such giving up depends entirely on his efforts and is exclusively beneficial to him alone." *Ibid.*, IV. 88-106. But such passages are the exception.

doctrine, in the rituals, in the *guru* and on the prerequisite of grace ends in fideism, how it safeguards the doctrine itself and the existing structure of empirical relationships.

Thus far we have considered the first four propositions that were listed at the beginning of the chapter: that mind is the proximate cause of bondage as well as the initial means towards liberation; that from a practical standpoint mind is ideation; that we must use the mind itself to end all ideation so that the mind is stilled and then dissolved; and that there are many ways of doing so. We have also seen how as the tradition developed these devices became objects, how they became ends in themselves. It is now time to move to the fifth and final proposition regarding means:

(V) Ultimately all the means have to be transcended, they have to be set aside.

The position of the Upanishads on the ultimate status of the means that have been so scrupulously listed in them is unambiguous: the means are mere aids, mere steps on a ladder, which are helpful at particular stages in one's search; ultimately each of them must be transcended, it must be set aside, it must even be denied. The role of each is merely to ferry one to a stage at which one is equipped to make use of the next more difficult device. From the standpoint of each stage, the devices that were useful earlier are the "lower knowledge," the devices that are meant for the "less gifted" or for those who have not progressed as far in the search.

The lower Brahman is the Word;
The Eternal, when that wears off,
Remains; Its knower shall, for peace of mind,
On the Eternal meditate.
Two Brahmans are to be pondered on:
The Word and Brahman Supreme;
In the Word well versed, one attains
Brahman Supreme.
The acute mind, after study of texts,
On knowledge and wisdom intent,
Must forsake all, as one who seeks grain
Forsakes the husk perforce.[152]

Then the least-qualified votary, who cannot be expected to command the faculties for the direct perception of the *Turya Turiya* that persons with superior and intermediate qualifications command, should have recourse to the following method (for being awakered to such perception. . . . Then (after studying the Veda-s and attaining the grace of the *Guru*), the votary should steadily fix on the great seat in the interior of the *Sushumna*-path, fit to be the resting place of the Lord *Sri Nrisimha*, this

[152] *Tripura tapiny upanishad*, V, 19-21.

Sa-kala Brahman possessed on the *muladhara* as its support that is all-embracing and full of immortality and hence of the fourfold character, this *Nrisimha-Paramatman* of the character of self-luminous existence and bliss, along with his retinue of devotees, attached to him alone and to none other. . . . Then should he worship the *A-kara* Brahman (the Creator) of the sevenfold forms, (earth and others), and of the fourfold character.[153]

Then he said to them: 'These are, assuredly, the foremost forms of the supreme, the immortal, the bodiless Brahman. To whichever one each man is attached here, in its world he rejoices indeed. For thus has it been said: "Verily, this whole world is Brahman".'

Verily, these, which are its foremost forms, one should meditate upon, and praise, but then deny. For with these one moves higher and higher in the worlds. But in the universal dissolution he attains the unity of the Person—yea, of the Person![154]

(It is only) so long as the seeker does not attain knowledge of the real that endless ceremonies, observances of purity, prayers, likewise performance of sacrifices, visits to places of pilgrimage (are prescribed by the scriptures).[155]

Ultimately one must transcend not just rituals etc., but the *Shastra*-s, the Veda-s themselves, one must transcend knowledge itself.

What is to be known is the subtle imperishable existence. One's whole life is unsteady. (Therefore) giving up the network of scriptures (which are many and endless), let the truth be meditated on.[156]

. . .The two *Vidya*-s that ought to be known are the *Shabda-Brahman* and that Brahman which transcends it. He who is well-versed in the *Shabda-Brahman*. attains the transcendent Brahman. The wise man, having studied the works bearing on the knowledge of the Brahman, e.g., the *Sadhana-chatustaya*, etc., intent on the sound acquisition of the knowledge of the Brahman, should abandon the books in their entirety, even as a seeker after grain would abandon the husk.[157]

Even as a torch bearer in quest of treasure should, on finding the treasure, give up the torch; one should, on coming to realize, through knowledge, the quest of all knowledge (the Brahman), give up knowledge thereafter.[158]

[153] *Nrisimha-Tapinyupanishad*, *Uttara-Tapini*, III. 8, 9. For a similar progression see *Rama-Tapinyupanishad*, *Purva-Tapini*, I. 7-80 cited earlier.
[154] *Maitreyopanishad*, IV. 6.
[155] *Ibid.*, IV. 17.
[156] *Brahmavidyopanishad*, 36.
[157] *Paingalopanishad*, IV. 18.
[158] *Amrita-Bindopanishad*, 16-18.

To him then he said: 'There are two knowledges to be known—as indeed the knowers of Brahman are wont to say: a higher and also a lower.

Of these, the lower is the Rig-veda, the Yajur-veda, the Sama-veda, the Atharva-veda. . . . Now, the higher is that whereby that Imperishable is apprehended.[159]

. . .What is the use of milk to one satiated with nectar? Even so, what is the use of the study of the Veda-s for one who has perceived the Self? For the *Yogin* who is satisfied with the nectar of knowledge (of Brahman) there is nothing whatsoever that has yet to be achieved. If there is anything (still to be achieved), he is not a knower of the truth.[160]

. . .Those that are lured by their proficiency in the *Shastra*-s and by their ignorance as well, fall into the traps of the *Shastra*-s. Neither by them, nor even by the celestial beings can that indescribable state of the Brahman be adequately described. That form, which becomes manifested by the light of Atman alone, how can that be manifested by the *Shastra*-s? That, whereby all things, from the sun down to the pot, are manifested, wherefrom the Vedas and the *Shastra*-s derive their significance and purpose, that Brahman can never be manifested by the *Shastra*-s, that being capable of self-manifestation alone and beyond the range of expression by sentence or word or their import.[161]

Those that are caught within the snares of *Shastra*-lore fall, being deluded by the little knowledge gleaned therefrom. That Brahman with a form which manifests itself of its own accord apart from the word-content and import of the *Shastras*, which derive their significance therefrom, how can that be made manifest by the *Shastra* (mere book-knowledge)?[162]

Indeed, in the ultimate analysis, not just rituals, chants, *Shastra*-s, etc., but reason itself, "knowledge" itself must be transcended. For—and this brings us back to the conception of the Absolute with which we started—as the Absolute is *nirguna*, without properties, without aspects, He really cannot be grasped by reason, He is beyond rational processes, He is beyond the mind.

This point is emphasized again and again in two ways. The first is of direct affirmation and the second is of portraying Him by paradoxes. The function of the latter is the same as of the Zen Koans; that is, to help the aspirant realize, to help him experience the limits of rationality, of reason itself and to help him break out of them

[159]*Mundakopanishad*, I. 1. 5. [160]*Paingalopanishad*, IV. 9.

I shall introduce the reader to a few examples of each of these two ways that the Upanishads adopt for reminding us about the limits of the means, of reason itself. The passages will serve the incidental purpose of taking us back to the conception of the Brahman with which we started our survey of the Upanishadic world-view. Having arrived back at the beginning of the circle, we will then be equipped to begin our survey of the consequences of this world-view.

First, then, we notice that the Upanishads affirm repeatedly that the Absolute is beyond the reach of all the means that have been listed thus far, that He is beyond the reach of reason, knowledge, comprehension.

In a famous passage that is echoed often in the Upanishads, the *Kenoupanishad* tells us

> There the eye goes not;
> Speech goes not, nor the mind.
> We know not, we understand not,
> How would one teach It?
> Other, indeed, is It than the known,
> And moreover above the unknown.
> —Thus have we heard of the ancients
> Who to us have explained It. . . .[163]

We are told again and again that Brahman is unknowable, incomprehensible, indescribable and, hence, beyond the range of the mind, of reason, of the senses.

> Incomprehensible is that Supreme Soul, unlimited, un-born, not to be reasoned about, unthinkable—He whose soul is space! In the dissolution of the world He alone remains awake. From that space He, assuredly, awakes this world, which is a mass of thought. It is thought by Him, and in Him it disappears.[164]

> For thus has it been said: 'Now where knowledge is of a dual nature, there, indeed, one hears, sees, smells, tastes, and also touches; the soul knows everything. Where knowledge is not of a dual nature, being devoid of action, cause, or effect, unspeakable, incomparable, indescribable—what is that? It is impossible to say!'[165]

> That which is the cause of the fading of the petals and the dissolution of the phenomenal world, which is the established import of the great scriptural texts, which lies beyond the range of speech and the mind,

[163] *Kenopanishad*, I.3. *Ishopanishad*, 10, 13; *Taittiriyopanishad*, II. 4, 9; *Katharudropanishad*, 35-8, are similar.

[164] *Maitreyopanishad*, VI. 17; see V. 1 also.

[165] *Ibid.*, VI. 7

which is the absolute existence, pure sentience and unsurpassed bliss, 'That Brahman alone am I and nought else.'[166]

Brahman is ungraspable and undemonstrable, it having no hands and feet, nor eyes and ears, nor tongue, nor body.[167]

The point of the Brahman not being graspable by the senses, by reason, by the mind, is often made by pointing out that He is none of the things, or states or qualities that can be grasped by the senses, by reason, by the mind.

That Soul is not this, it is not that (*neti, neti*). It is unseizable, for it cannot be seized. It is indestructible, for it cannot be destroyed. It is unattached, for it does not attach itself. It is unbound. It does not tremble. It is not injured.[168]

Passages of this kind occur repeatedly. Even when Brahman is being identified with the fourth stage of sleep or with a state such as *Turya-Turiya*, He is in fact being described as incomprehensible, indescribable. For in these states, by definition, all the senses, all powers of cognition and comprehension, the mind itself, are stilled; hence, no one can "comprehend" what he "sees" or experiences there nor can anyone bring back an account, a description from that shore.

Hence, the *Isha* and other Upanishads affirm

Other, indeed, they say, than knowledge!
Other, they say, than non knowledge!
—Thus we have heard from the wise
Who to us have explained It.[169]

It is conceived of by him by whom It is not conceived of.
He by whom It is conceived of, knows It not.
It is not understood by those who (say they) understand It.
It is understood by those who (say they) understand It not. . . .[170]

Not by reasoning is this thought to be attained. . . .His form is not to be beheld. No one sees Him with the eye. He is framed by the heart, by the thought, by the mind. They who know That become immortal. When cease the five (sense) knowledges, together with the mind the intellect stirs not—that, they say, is the highest course. This they consider as *Yoga*—the firm holding back of the senses. Then one becomes undistracted. *Yoga*, truly, is the origin and the end. Not by speech, not by mind, not by sight can He be apprehended. How can

[166] *Mahopanishad*, II. 1-11.
[167] *Sandilyopanishad*, II. 3.
[168] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, IV. 4. 22; III. 9-26 is identical.
[169] *Ishopanishad*, 10.
[170] *Kenopanishad*, II. 11.

He be comprehended otherwise than by one's saying 'He is'?[171]

The second way in which the need to transcend all devices—specially reason—is emphasized is by presenting the Brahman in paradoxical terms, by showing Him to contain contraries simultaneously.

Unmoving, the One is swifter than the mind.
The sense-powers reached not It, speeding on before.
Past others running, This goes standing.
In it *Matarisvan* places action.
It moves, It moves not,
It is far, and It is near.
It is within all this,
And it is outside of all this.[172]

Sitting, he proceeds afar;
Lying, he goes everywhere.
Who else than I is able to know
The God who rejoices and rejoices not.[173]

Manifest, (yet) hidden—What that is, Know as being and non-being ....Heavenly, formless is the Person.
He is without and within, unborn, breathless, mindless, pure,
Higher than the high Imperishable.[174]

Than whom there is naught else higher. Than whom there is naught else smaller, naught else greater.
...Seeming to possess the quality of all the senses, It is devoid of all the senses....
Without foot or hand, he is swift and a seizer
He sees without eye, he hears without ear...
More minute than the minute, greater than the great....
This living (self) is to be known as a part
Of the hundredth part of the point of a hair
Subdivided a hundredfold;
And yet it partakes of infinity.[175]

I am subtler than the subtle, greater than the great. I am this manifold universe, I am the ancient, the person. I am the lord of golden hue. I am Shiva...I am without hands and feet, of inconceivable powers. I see

[171] *Kathopanishad*, II. 9, VI. 9-12.
[172] *Ishopanishad*, 4, 5.
[173] *Kathopanishad*, II. 21.
[174] *Mundakopanishad*, II. 2. 1, III. 1. 7.
[175] *Shvetashvataropanishad*, III. 9, 17, 19, 20, V. 9; passages of this kind occur often, for instance *Narada-Parivrajakopanishad*, 9. 15-17.

without eyes, I hear without ears. I know (all). I am of one form. None knows me. I am always pure consciousness.[176]

I am the *Ishvara* of the Universe that has no eyes (to perceive the difference between what is subject to the influence of *Upadhi* and what is devoid of *Upadhi*) and at the same time has eyes turned in all directions (over the entire universe), that hath no ears and at the same time has ears turned in all directions, that has no feet and at the same time has feet moving in all directions, that has no hands and at the same time has hands that stretch out in all directions, that has no head and at the same time heads that jut out in all directions. I am the *Ishvara* that could be resorted to only through *Vidyamantra*.[177]

(Brahman) is released from all kinds of *Upadhis* (limitations) while yet invested with all the known powers of such *Upadhis*.[178]

Without eyes He sees everything and everywhere; without ears He hears everything and everywhere; without feet He moves everywhere; without hands He apprehends everything; without *antahkarana* He knows all and remains omnipresent and omniscient.[179]

The *Gita* too describes the Supreme in similarly paradoxical terms:

Shining by the functions of all the senses, (yet) without the senses; unattached, yet supporting all; devoid of qualities. Without and within (all) beings; the unmoving as also the moving. Incomprehensible because It is subtle; and near and far away is That; And undivided, yet remaining divided as it were in beings; supporter of beings too is That, the Knowable; devouring, yet generating.[180]

The purpose of all these paradoxical accounts is the same: reflecting on them, the aspirant will perceive the limits of reason; experiencing these limits in his very being, he shall break out of the confines of mere rationality.

Hence does the *Ishopanishad* warn:

Into blind darkness enter they that worship ignorance; Into darkness greater than that, as it were, they that delight in knowledge.[181]

We began this account of means by noticing that in the view of the Upanishads, just as reality is one, there is only one legitimate aim for man, and that aim is to dissolve in Brahman. For attaining this dissolution, man

176 *Kaivalyopanishad*, 20, 21.
177 *Bhasmajabalopanishad*, II. 12-14.
178 *Nir*
179 *Nrisimha-Tapiniyupanishad*, *Purva-Tapini*, II. 12.

must first dissolve his mind, he must abjure empirical knowledge, he must abjure curiosity and wonder, he must not be affected by anything that happens around him, indeed he must end all ideation. We noticed next that to achieve this state of inertness a variety of means are recommended. Before concluding this rapid enumeration we should notice two features which are of some significance for our subsequent discussion.

The first thing to notice is that the effort which the Upanishads recommend is an *inner-directed* effort. The aspirant is asked to turn away from the outer world, from the happenings round and about him, he is urged to roll up his senses and to plunge inward. As the *Kathopanishad* puts it, the contrast between us, ordinary men and women, who flap about in the world and the wise man who realizes Brahman consists precisely in the fact that we "look" outwards and he "looks" inwards:

> The Self-existent pierced the openings (of the senses) outward;
> Therefore one looks outward, not within himself.
> A certain wise man, while seeking immortality,
> Introspectively beheld the Atman face to face.[182]

> The Gita counsels the same thing when it tells us
> Who so has his joy within and his pastime
> within, and who so has his light within only,
> that *yogin* attains Brahman's bliss, himself
> becoming Brahman.[183]

This emphasis on inwardness follows, as we shall see in the next chapter, from the Upanishadic view about the nature, cause and, therefore, the cure of suffering.[184]

The second point to note concerns the place of rituals, talismans and the like in the Upanishads. As is well known, several of the Upanishads (as well as the *Gita*) themselves represent a revolt against the extreme and obsessive ritualism to which Vedic religion had sunk. These texts tried to carve out a small sphere of autonomy by asserting that rituals, scriptures etc., had all to be transcended at the penultimate stage in one's quest and that, in any case, they were of no use to those who had already realized the great truth, the *Jnanis*. The list was later extended to include those who had forsaken the world in their quest, the *Sannyasis*. The sphere of freedom and autonomy that some of the Upanishads and the *Gita* tried to carve out in this manner was narrow and circumscribed—it could be said to apply, after all, to only a very small handful of persons—but at least an effort had been made to break out of obsessive and extreme ritualism. Unfortunately, even this limited effort failed By the time Shankaracharya came upon the scene, for instance, rituals

[182] *Kathopanishad*, 4. 1.
[183] *Bhagvad Gita*, 5. 24.
[184] "But what about the *Gita*? Does it not urge Arjuna to fight a war? Is that an inner-directed effort?" This important question is taken up in Chapter 7.

and the like had again become the *sine qua non* for everyone. The labour he had to put in to reaffirm that indeed the texts did leave a sphere of autonomy and relative freedom for at least a few individuals becomes painfully obvious in his commentary on the *Gita*. His singular purpose in the commentary seems to be precisely to use the text to somehow show that at least the *Jnanis* need not spend their time in *yagyas*, sacrifices and the like. But this effort too failed. For, as we have seen, and this is the point to keep in mind as we move on to consider what "practice" followed from the world-view of these texts, the ritual-mongering portions of the texts are the ones that came to dominate popular imagination.

6

CONSEQUENCES–I: MAN, HIS SUFFERING AND HIS GOAL

Reality, according to the Upanishads, is an undifferentiated non-corporeality, it is pure consciousness. While particular descriptions of it vary all the way from imperfect, approximate similies and metaphors to elaborate and comprehensive denials, in general the world-view sets up a graduated scale of the reality quotient of substances, of concepts. On this scale the substances we perceive with our senses are farthest from reality, the non-corporeal is nearer it, the essence itself is not just non-corporeal, it is an indescribable, inconceivable non-corporeality.

I. MAN

We are often told that the Hindu tradition exalts man, that it raises him to the level of the Absolute Itself. But, as we have seen in Chapter 3, what is exalted is a disembodied, non-corporeal Atman. An abstraction is what is being equated with another abstraction. The empirical man is reviled, ridiculed. His body is abused. His desires are abused. His senses are said to be snares. His mind, his thinking faculties are said to be unruly monkeys among trees, aimless dogs wandering in empty villages. On this doctrine, human nature as we know it must be killed in order to heal its ailments.

As the empirical, sensuous, corporeal man does not exist, empirical relations obviously cannot exist: how can there be relations between entities that aren't even there? In any case, no importance can be attached to such relations.

As in the case of man himself, Upanishadic references to his fellow-men, to his empirical existence itself are derisive and abusive.

The mother's womb becomes "the seething cauldron of the hell of a mother's womb"[1] His desires become irrelevant and worse.

> In this sort of cycle of existence what is the good enjoyment of desires, when after a man has fed on them there is seen repeatedly his return here to earth? . . .[2]

Man is said to drift along in the "state of self-conceit, borne along and

[1]*Garbhopanishad*, 12-17.

[2]*Maitreyopanishad*, 1-4.

defiled by the stream of qualities, unsteady, wavering, bewildered, full of desire, distracted. . . .'"[3] "What is called poison," we are told, "is no poison at all. The mischief wrought by objects of pleasure, that alone is poison. . . . Objects of sensual pleasure adversely affect even future incarnations, while poison takes away only one incarnation. . . ."[4] "Life," we are told is no life at all:

> Even trees live and also beasts and birds. But he alone lives truly whose mind is well sustained through meditation. It is only those beings that lead a noble and righteous life and are not born again in this world, that are verily born. The others are only old asses. . . .[5]

No part of one's existence is of any worth at all:

> In childhood there is fear of the teacher, fear of the mother, fear of the father likewise, fear of people old and young. Childhood is verily a den of fear. The youth who gets out of control, due to the influence of the demon of lust, harboured in the cavern of his own head and bringing about various amorous movements, is ultimately vanquished by it. Servants, sons, women, relations and friends likewise laugh at a man shaking with old age, as at a mad man. The one companion of all forms of danger and the bestower of heart-burning, desire grows in intensity, during old age, full of melancholy meanness. . . .[6]

> Smitten with ignorance during childhood, tormented by women during adolescence, and afflicted with the worries of wife and children during the rest of his life, what can a poor mortal of an inferior type do, (under the circumstances, except bewailing in the following terms): 'Non-existence stands over the head of existence (threatening to overwhelm it), what is unpleasant rides over the heads of what are pleasant and sorrows press over the heads of joys. Which one (out of these pairs of opposites) am I to resort to? Even great souls of influence, at the closing or opening of whose eyes the dissolution or the creation of phenomenal worlds take place, even they vanish into oblivion. Where would men of my type stand in the reckoning? It is worldly existence alone that is characterized as the utmost limit of human misery. When this (frail) body has found itself in its midst, how can it attain its well-being?. . .'[7]

The woman man longs for is reviled in harsh and, some will surely say, foul language:

> What is there that is beautiful in the cage-like body of a woman, who is an automaton made of flesh and possessed of joints of tendons and bones?

[3] *Ibid.*, VI. 30.
[4] *Ibid.*, III. 27-36.
[5] *Mahopanishad*, III. 50-55.
[6] *Ibid.*, VI. 22-26.
[7] *Ibid.*, III. 4-15.

(O Mind!) Look at the eyes (of a woman) after separating the membrane, flesh, blood and the watery tears and say if at all there is beauty (in them). Why then dost thou get deluded in vain? The self-same breast of a young woman the sheen of the pearl-necklace resting over which, O Sage! is seen to resemble the stream of the Ganges, sparkling over the slopes of (the golden) Mount Meru, when the time comes for it, is swallowed easily as a bolus of food by dogs, in the cremation grounds situated everywhere, with the points of the compass as their farthest limits. Women, that form the flame of the fire of the wicked deeds of men, wearing soot-like (jet-black) hair, incapable of being touched even with difficulty (in their dalliance) and ravishingly beautiful to the eyes, burn a man like straw. Verily women form the beautiful, yet fierce heaps of fuel, full of amorous graces, yet dry, to feed the fires of the infernal regions, even though they rage at a far-off distance. With their characteristic artless simplicity, women are the nets cast by the fowler, *Kama*, for binding the limbs of the birds of men. Woman as the bait attached to the fish-hook provided with the string of *Dur-vasana*-s (latent desires of a vicious type) for tempting men that are fish in the pond of births and deaths, that move over the ooze of the mind, susceptible to the influence of *Dur-vasana*-s. Let me have nothing more to do with woman, the chain of misery for all time and the casket of gems among wrecked deeds of all kinds. The desire for sexual enjoyment springs up in one, for whom there is a woman. Where is the scope for such enjoyment in the case of he who has no woman? The phenomenal world is given up by the giving up of a woman. After the giving up of the phenomenal world one becomes a happy man. . . .[8]

Though there is no difference between the unmentionable region of women and a putrified ulcer, people are generally deceived by the difference in outlook. A piece of skin split in twain and perfumed by the *apana*—wind—a bow to those who take delight in it. What is greater rashness than this?[9]

Joy is declared to be sorrow.

Where is the propriety in arriving at a conclusion as to the purpose served by a city of the *Gandharva*-s (which does not at all exist), or as to its decorated or non-decorated character? So also, (where is the charm in finding out) the measure of happiness and misery resulting from sons and other kith and kin, that partake of the nature of *Avidya* (non-existence)? When wealth, wife, progeny and the like are on the increase, sorrow and not exultation would be appropriate. For, when the delusion arising out

[8]*Ibid.*, III. 39-49; *Yajnavalkyopanishad*, 14-22, are similar.
[9]*Narada-Parivrajakopanishad*, 4. 28-29.

of *Maya* is on the increase, which person in this world would have a sense of relief? . . .[10]

Indeed, empirical existence itself becomes not just the greatest curse that befalls man, it becomes *the* curse that befalls him. It is said to be "verily the hole wherein serpents of the form of wicked temptations abide."[11] Reincarnation, we are told, is ruination,[12] it is the source of misery. Escape from wordly existence becomes not just a goal, it becomes an obsession.

It can hardly be maintained, then, that the tradition exalts man, that it celebrates his identity with Brahman, with all of creation.

Apart from the fact that in its pure form the tradition conjures man away as an abstraction, it isolates him and dwarfs him.

Man is no longer a being in society and of society, a being in active and productive relationship with other beings like himself. He is an abstraction whose only significant relationship is with another abstraction, Brahman, and the significance of the relationship is that the two abstractions turn out to be one.

At a more mundane level, the tradition dwarfs man. It does so by attributing all creativity to the Absolute. (It does not, of course, stop in this matter, as in others that we shall encounter in Chapter 8, to examine the logical consequences of its world-view: after all, if reality is an undifferentiated, attributeless, unchanging consciousness, then what is creativity of the Absolute for, on what is it exercised, what possible effect can it have at all?)

In the pure exposition, as we have seen, the Brahman is all, there is nothing else apart from Him. From being all, He becomes the cause, the support of all. The *Chandogya*, in an oft-quoted passage, declares Him to be the unseen—but active—cause, like the "nothing" that we ultimately reach when we go on splitting the seed, the "nothing" from which the tree still sprouts.

> 'Bring hither a fig from there.'
> 'Here it is, sir.'
> 'Divide it.'
> 'It is divided, sir.'
> 'What do you see there?.'
> 'These rather fine seeds, sir.'
> 'Of these, please, divide one.'
> 'It is divided, sir.'
> 'What do you see there?'
> 'Nothing at all, sir.'
> Then he said to him: 'Verily my dear, that finest essence which you do not

[10] *Mahopanishad*, V. 164-177.

[11] *Ibid.*, V. 164-177.

[12] *Ibid.*, II. 35-41.

perceive—verily, my dear, from that finest essence this great *Nyagrodha* (sacred fig) tree thus arises. . . .'[13]

He becomes the very root, the home, the support of all.[14] Everything, every person, every act, every happening comes to arise from Him.[15]

At the next step He is not just the original, ultimate cause, the substratum on which all else is based, He becomes the active and immediate cause of all that happens. He is not just the author and source of time[16] and such-like, He comes to direct the minutest details of our lives, our minutest thoughts and deeds. He is now the only doer.

> The sun shines not there, nor the moon and stars; These lightnings shine not, much less this (earthly) fire!
> After Him, as He shines, doth everything shine.
> This whole world is illumined with his light. . . .[17]

> The Brahman of the form of the *Hamsa*, indicated by the cluster of letters, the *Omkara*, is the Ishvara that prompts men to betake and to avoid actions respectively leading to their welfare and their misery. . . .[18]

> He who is the maker of all, the all-knower, self-sourced,
> Intelligent, the author of time, possessor of qualities, omniscient,
> Is the ruler of Primary Matter and of the spirit, the lord of qualities
> The cause of reincarnation and of liberation, of continuance and of bondage. . . .[19]

> Now arises the question: 'Why is *Ishana* so called?' The answer is: 'For the reason that he controls all the worlds through the transcendent powers of sentient action, of sentient knowledge, and of sentient desire. . . O omnipotent, Indra, we prostrate ourselves all around thee, that art the supreme controller of all mobile animal beings unto which thou hast allotted their respective functions as also of all immobile inanimate things around thee, whose growth and the like thou controllest, thou that art the all-seeing supreme judge of the celestial and other worlds. . . .'[20]

> Now, when the eye is directed thus toward space, that is the seeing person; the eye is (the instrument) for seeing. Now, he who knows 'Let me smell this'—that is the Self; the nose is (the instrument) for smelling. Now, he who knows, 'Let me utter this'—that is the Self; the voice is

[13] *Chandogyopanishad*, VI. 12-1-2.
[14] *Ibid.*, VII. 2.6.1.
[15] *Ibid.*, VI. 8.4. *Maitreyopanishad*, VI 32, VI. 9; *Prashnopanishad*, II. 6-13; *Mundakopanishad*, II. 1.1, 3, 5, 9; II. 2.2, 5; *Kaivalyopanishad*, 14 are typical.
[16] *Shvetashvataropanishad*, VI. 2.
[17] *Shvetashvataropanishad*, VI. 14; see also, e.g., *Mundakopanishad*, II. 2-10.
[18] *Pashupatabrahmopanishad*, *Uttara-Kanda*, 1.
[19] *Shvetashvataropanishad*, VI. 16.
[20] *Atharvashi*...

(the instrument) for utterance. Now, he who knows 'Let me hear this'—that is the Self; the ear is (the instrument) for hearing. Now, he who knows 'Let me think this'—that is the Self; the mind is his divine eye. He, verily, with that divine eye, the mind, sees desires here, and experiences enjoyment. . . .[21]

Verily, O Gargi, that Imperishable is the unseen Seer, the unheard Hearer, the unthought Thinker, the ununderstood Understander. Other than It there is naught that sees. Other than It there is naught that hears. Other than It there is naught that thinks. Other than It there is naught that understands. Across this Imperishable, O Gargi, is space woven, warp and woof. . . .[22]

The one spreader of the net, who rules with his ruling powers,
Who rules all the worlds with his ruling powers . . .
Who is the overlord of the gods . . .
Who is the lord of the biped and quadruped here . . .
He indeed is the protection of the world in time,
The overlord of all . . .
That God spreads out each single net (of illusion) manifoldly,
And draws it together here in the world.
Thus again, having created his *Yatis*, the Lord,
The Great Soul, exercises universal overlordship.
As the illumining sun shines upon
All regions, above, below, and across,
So that One God, glorious, adorable,
Rules over whatever creatures are born from a womb.
The source of all, who develops his own nature,
Who brings to maturity whatever can be ripened,
And who distributes all qualities
Over this whole world rules the One. . . .[23]

That eternal radiance with thousands of heads, with thousands of eyes, that is the bestower of bliss on the *Vishva*, that transcends beyond the *Vishva*, that is eternal, that is of the form of the *Vishva*, that is Narayana, that is Hari, that is the supreme ruler, the omnipotent controller of the *Vishva* . . . by resorting to whom, the *Vishva*, derives its sentience. . . .[24]

The Shiva, the Lord of the *Pashu*-s, is the witness of all things, always, of his own accord. Directed by him in the proper manner, the mind of all proceeds towards its functions; the *Prana* moves in its wonted course; the

[21] *Chandogyopanishad*, VIII. 12.4, 5; *also Aitareyopanishad*, V. 1; *Kenopanishad*, I. 1-8.
[22] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, III. 8-11; also, *ibid.*, III. 7.23 and *Kathopanishad*, IV. 3-5.
[23] *Shvetashvataropanishad*, III. 1, IV. 13, 15, V. 3-5.

organ of speech functions, the eye sees forms; the ear hears all sounds. All the other organs of sense, directed by him alone, proceed each in direction of discharging its functions, without intermission. This direction of his is not out of his natural inclination, but is due to Illusion.[25]

This Atman is verily the one essence of authority and is palpable supreme sentience alone, for the reason that before the beginning of all things (long before they came to be), at the present time and in the future as well, it has been, is and will ever be perfectly manifest; on that account it is palpable sentience alone. Neither the *Otr*, nor the *Anujnatr* is this *Turya*. All this phenomenal existence is verily related to the *Turya-Chaitanya*. This *Turya-Chaitanya* alone, which is the *Omkara*, is always the one essence of authority alone, which directs verily all the universe with the monosyllable '*Om*.' The *Omkara* is speech alone. It is speech alone that directs by means of sounds and syllables. This *Omkara* is verily full of sentience. The *Turya*, the supreme director, is sentience alone. . . .[26]

He becomes now the "loveliness-uniter," the "goods-bringer," the "light-bringer,"[27] the Lord of desires who grants them or turns them down,[28] the Lord of the sense organs,[29] the great grammarian, the great astronomer,[30] the Lord of prosperity, the bringer of right, the remover of evil,[31] the one who consumes the wealth of our foes. . . .[32]

The reader must have noticed three implications of this process of bringing Brahman, so to say, down to earth.

First, the *nirguna* Absolute has by now been endowed with person-like qualities, with human powers.

Second, in the process man's control over these qualities, and these powers has been diminished. He is the director, we merely do as we are told.

Once again he (Paippaladin) asked him (Jabalin) thus: 'What are the *Pashu*-s? Pray tell me.' 'The *Jiva*-s are said to be the *Pashu*-s. *Pashupati* is so called because of his being the controller of the *Pashus*' was Jabalin's reply. Again he (Paippaladin) asked him (Jabalin) thus: 'How can the *Jiva*-s be *Pashu*-s? How can their controller be *Pashupati*?' He (Jabalin) replied unto him (Paippaladin) thus: 'Even as cows and other (herbivorous) animals that subsist on grass, that are by themselves devoid of discrimination, that are driven by others, that are employed in agricultural and other operations, that put up with all kinds of torments, and are capable of being tethered by their masters, are the *Pashu*-s, even so are

[25] *Pashupatabrahmopanishad*, *Uttara-Kanda*, 7-14.
[26] *Nrisimha-Tapinyupanishad*, *Uttara-Tapini*, VIII. 4.
[27] *Chandogyopanishad*, IV. 15. 2-4.
[28] *Kathopanishad*, V. 8, 13; *Tripura-tapini*, I. 19 to mention just two.
[29] *Shvetashvataropanishad*, VI. 9.
[30] *Shvetashvataropanishad*, VI. 6.
[31] *Krishnopanishad*, II. 1.
[32] *Tripura-tapinyupanishad*, I. 3

the *Jiva*-s *Pashu*-s; even as the masters of such cows and other animals are *Pashupati*-s, even so the omniscient *Isha* is *Pashupati*. . . .[33]

I alone am praised by all beings (such as men and the like) and the gods as well (as the Brahman alone). The wind wafts only out of fear for me. The Sun rises only out of fear for me. Agni (the God of Fire) and Indra (both of them discharge their duties) only out of fear for me. I, conjoint with Uma, am alone the controller of all and the protector of all. . . .[34]

He alone is creative, He is the only doer.

The *yogi* who has seen the Truth knows that it is not he that acts whilst seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, walking, sleeping or breathing, talking, letting go, holding fast, opening or closing the eyes—in the conviction that it is the senses that are moving in their respective spheres. . . .[35]

The light in the sun which illumines the whole universe and which is in the moon and in fire—that light, know thou, is Mine; . . . It is I, who penetrating the earth uphold all beings with my strength, and becoming the moon—the essence of all sap—nourish all the herbs; . . . It is I who becoming the *Vaishvanara* (Fire) and entering the bodies of all that breathe, assimilate the four kinds of food with the help of the outward and the inward breaths. . . . And I am seated in the hearts of all, from Me proceed memory, knowledge and the dispelling of doubt; it is I who am to be known in all the Vedas, I, the author of Vedanta and the knower of the Vedas. . . .[36]

God, O Arjuna, dwells in the heart of every being and by His delusive mystery whirls them all, (as though) set on a machine. . . .[37]

Once begun, there is no end to this process. Soon enough the *Rudrakhsa mala*, the *Tripundra* mark, the *Urdhava-pundra*-mark, the individual deities, the hymns, the assorted *yantras* all come to have—indeed, to *be*— the creative power, each of them becomes the doer and man becomes the helpless done-to.

The relevant Upanishads—for instance, the *Akshamalikopanishad* in the case of *Rudrksha-mala*, the *Rama-Tapinyupanishad* in the case of an assortment of *yantras*—provide text-book illustrations in which we can see the process of alienation at work right before our eyes. The authors of the

[33] *Jabalyupanishad*, 10-15.
[34] *Bhasmajabalopanishad*, II.9-11.
[35] *Bhagvad Gita*, V. 8.9.
[36] *Ibid.*, XV. 12-15.
[37] *Ibid.*, XVIII. 61. I will take this matter up in greater detail in Chapter 7 where I consider the implications of this view for ethics, responsibility and practice in general.

Upanishads seem to have gone out of their way to lay out perfect, almost classic, cases for classroom instruction. The votary is told first "let the first bead of the rosary signify 'x', let the second bead signify 'y' . . . let the string signify 'z'."[38] Next he is told to invoke the powers and to ask them to enter the respective parts of the rosary as their permanent abode.[39] This having been assumed to have happened the rosary now is potent in itself, it is now the doer, it is now, as I mentioned earlier, "the causer of firmness in all without exception," it is "the driver of evil spirits," it is "the dealer of death unto the delusion relating to the existence of the universe apart from Brahman," it is the one that "promptest all," it is the one that "vouchsafest protection unto all the worlds through (its) omnipotence, that sustainest all the worlds, that createst all things, that causes the prevalence of the day . . . of the night, that causes the multitudinous streams to flow. . . that renders travel from place to place safe. . . ."[40]

By the identical process a *yantra* acquires the powers we forfeit.

> The *Yantra*, described above, is full of *Mantra*-s of great potency, adorned as it is with highly efficacious *Mantra*-s proceeding from the in-most recesses of the hearts of *Yogin*-s of great fortitude and when duly worshipped with the sixteen marks of respect prescribed therefore and practised with the requisite *Japa* (prayer) and *Homa* (fire-offerings), becomes replete with the pure-radiance of the Brahman, serves as a safe-guard against all risks, brings about the destruction of all kinds of sins, procures the attainment of all the desires of one's heart, and bestows (the highest kind of) liberation, *viz. Sayujya*, (attainment of oneness with the Brahman). . . .[41]

> This *Yantra*, which has been related above, which comprises all, and which is adored by all sages, is the bestower of liberation, (through the attainment of the four ends and aims of life, *viz. Dharma, Artha, Kama*, and *Moksha*) on all persons who worship it; it increases the duration of their lives and vouchsafes unto them immunity from disease of any kind; it bestows sons on those who have no sons. What need is there to say more about its efficacy and the fruits therefrom? In short, they will attain even in this life, in a short while, virtuous conduct and other ends and aims of life completely. . . .[42]

A hymn, a chant, the name of a deity become similarly potent:

> These hymns are likewise endowed with the virtue of bestowing the boon of the gratification of all desires of the heart. Those who study them,

[38] For instance, see *Akshamalikopanishad*, 2-5. [39] *Ibid.*, 6-13.
[40] *Ibid.*, 15. [41] *Tripad-Vibhuti Maha-Narayanopanishad*, VII. 49.
[42] *Rama-Tapinyupanishad, Purva-Tapini*, IV. 65-7.

attain the highest type of liberation, identity with the Brahman alone, with all their flaws eradicated. . . .[43]

By making this Atman of bliss go after the *A-kara* (the first *Matra* of *Pranava*) in accordance with the *Guru's* percept, one should realize the identical nature of *A-kara* with the Atman of bliss, for the reason that both of them have no origin, are immortal, have no dotage, thus demonstrating that they are beyond the province of the gross body, which alone is subject to these states, are eternal, free from fear, are free from sorrow of all kinds, are devoid of all delusions . . . . Similarly by making this Atman of bliss, go after the *U-kara* (the second *Matra* of the *Pranava*), in accordance with the *Guru's* precept, one should realize the identical nature of the syllable, *U-kara*, with this Atman that is self-manifest, the transcendent Brahman, the Lord *Nrisimha*, for the reason that both of them are excellent, cause them to function exceedingly well by pervading them entirely, regulate them in various ways after developing immense affection for them; act in a way contributing to the excellence of all beings; ward them off from taking to the wrong path; eclipse all other perceptions completely . . . . Then by a similar process, by making this self-radiant Atman go after the half-syllable, *Ma-kara* (the third *Matra* of the *Pranava*) one should, in accordance with the *Guru's* precept, establish the identity between the half-syllable, *Ma-kara* and the non-differentiated innermost *Turya*—the Atman—embracing all, for the reason that both of them are great and immeasurably radiant in point of attributes as well as substance, are adorable, liberated and thoroughly detached, are the supreme controllers of all phenomenal existence, both constitute the supreme states of existence, sentience, and bliss, and both are also possessed of the highest powers.[44]

Even as the gross banyan-tree, stupendous and prodigious in form and proportion, abides in the subtle banyan-seed in its potential state, even so, this vast and massive phenomenal world, along with its countless beings, animate and inanimate, abides in the subtle, seed-like mystic syllable, 'Ram,' indicative of Ram and full of potentiality. The gods of the Trinity will be contained in the seed-syllable, 'Ram,' also the goddesses differentiated as Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Gauri, representing their powers, will be likewise contained therein alone . . . .[45]

The *Tripundra* ashes become "the generator of all power and glory,"[46] urine and cow-dung themselves become the Upanishads, the *vidya*.[47] And so on.

[43] *Ibid.*, *Purva-Tapini*, V. 10.
[44] *Nrisimha-Tapinyupanishad*, *Uttara-Tapini*, VIII. 2.
[45] *Rama-Tapinyupanishad*, *Purva-Tapini*, II. 1-3.
[46] *Brihajjabalopanishad*, VI. 16; see also, e.g., *Bhasmajabalopanishad*, 4-7.

By the time this process ends, man is powerless; fantastic creations of his brain—gods, deities, chants—and of his hands—assorted marks, *malas*, diagrams—become powerful. Helpless and dwarfed, he sits back waiting for the *Mantra*-s to do their magic, for the marks to ward off evil, for the rituals to bear fruit, for Krishna to fulfil His promise: "Whenever there is a decay of religion, O Bharata, and irreligion ascends, then I manifest Myself. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of evil-doers, for the firm establishment of religion, I am born in every age."[48] Having given His word, He shall surely come, will He not? And may it not be that increasing privation is all to the good, after all? May it not be hastening His coming? In any case, as He, the all-powerful, the sole creative agent, is Himself decreeing whatever is happening, what can the puny and powerless I do?

Now, and this brings us to the third implication of reposing all creativity in the Absolute, now as *He* is the one who is doing everything, everything that happens, every relationship that comes to prevail, comes to have a purpose, a rationale.

The Universe, we are now told, is governed by the moral Law—*Rita*. In some expositions the Absolute itself is this moral Law. This leap is the ultimate in teleology: what started as a process of man alienating his power to fantasies of his own creation, what started as a quest for explaining the apparent orderliness of the Universe, now comes to endow the Universe, every particle in it, every occurrence in it, with a purpose.

This final leap has two immediate consequences. First, it further dwarfs man; the focus now shifts to *His* purpose, not to the purposes we set for ourselves, individually or in association with our fellow men. Second, my outrage at the circumstances that crush and impale me now comes to be *irrational*, a *failing*, a failing on *my* part. There is nothing wrong with the relationships, with the circumstances that impale me. There is a purpose to them. *I* am the one who is failing in my duty to discern the purpose on account of which they have been visited upon me. The incessant emphasis on the orderliness, the seeming rationality of the Universe does not just divert attention from the immediate empirical circumstances and relationships that crush the individual, it puts the individual on the defensive: after all, if the entire Universe is well and rationally-ordered, how can it be that *his* particular corner has remained unordered and irrational? That too *must* be ordered and rational; it *must* have a purpose. It is just that he—with all his imperfections and inadequacies—is not seeing the point of it all. The individual is the patient, not the circumstances in which he is placed. *He*, *his* perspective, *his* perception have to be changed, not the circumstances.

I need hardly point out that the vulgar form in which notions such as *Rita* enter the popular consciousness is even more directly helpful to the rulers. Firstly, as *Rta* governs all, the fact that the ruler has been placed on my head and I have been placed under his heel, this too must have some higher purpose behind it. Secondly, and for the same reason, whatever he does,

[48]*Bhagvad Gita*, 4. 7-8.

whatever inequities and privations he visits on me too must have the sanction of the ubiquitous higher purpose; after all, "not a leaf moves, not a blade of grass grows but in accordance with the Divine Purpose." Moreover, as we saw in the chapter on means and shall again see later when we examine the doctrine of two levels of truth, the tradition assiduously fosters the notion that individuals have different capacities for discerning the truth. From this it is but a step—and a short step at that—to swallowing the notion that *Rita* is beyond the comprehension of the oppressed, downtrodden, unlettered, ordinary mortals. The rulers, their exalted advisers—favoured with so much by the Absolute Himself, endowed with so much by the Absolute Himself—are in a much better position to divine the Purpose than us.

II. MAN'S SUFFERING

The tradition's view about suffering follows directly from its perception of reality: like all empirical phenomena, like empirical existence itself, suffering is an illusion, a mirage or, if a reality-quotient is to be conceded to it at all, a mere manifestation of the Absolute. In either case it deserves no attention. If it does not so much as exist then there is no question of paying any attention to it in any case. That is so even if it is a manifestation: for in that eventuality too, it is a *mere* manifestation, not the real thing, just as the picture of a person is not the person himself. To focus on it, to be affected by it would be, on this account, to be affected by mere appearance. The knower must go "behind," he must go "beyond" the mirage or the manifestation to the Brahman Itself.

If the manifestation is worthy of any attention at all it is only worthy of being looked upon as an aid to comprehending His purpose, only as an aid to our answering the question: "Why did He choose to manifest Himself in *this* form?" Indeed, some hold that empirical suffering can help turn our attention to Brahman and His purpose. Some votaries of the tradition would even maintain that it has been designed precisely to do so.

Thus, according to the tradition, man should not be affected by suffering. If he is pained by it, if he is distraught on account of it, then it is his own fault, either his fault in not realizing that as Brahman alone *is*, as nothing else *is*, suffering cannot even be there, much less can it cause him pain, or his fault in not discerning the purpose behind the suffering. The individual thus is the one who is responsible for the effects of the privations, for the pain they inflict on him. Of course, to the extent that the existence of suffering as a state is at all acknowledged, it is again the individual who is responsible for the state. He must have done something—in this life or in some previous one—to have been handed his condign suffering.

The individual then—through his *avidya*, through his *karma*, through his meaningless-will-to-live—is the one who is responsible for his own suffering.

…ffering is precisely to realize—

indeed, to internalize—its true status, to realize, to internalize the notion that it is *not* the Truth, it is *not* the Substance, it is *nothing*, at most it is a mere manifestation.

At the intellectual level the change is a matter of mere definition: as all is Brahman, as I am Brahman, as nothing apart from that undifferentiated pure consciousness exists, then obviously I cannot even *conceive* of, much less experience, suffering. As all has been melted into that undifferentiated unity, how can "suffering" exist as an entity in itself to be experienced by me, how can "I" exist as someone apart to experience it, how can "experience" itself exist?

Passages after passages in the Upanishads define suffering away in precisely this manner.

> The multitudinous functions of the mind are naught. There is no 'thou,' nor 'I,' nor 'other.' All is absolute Brahman. There is no scriptural text, nor the Veda, nor the letter . . . nor misdemeanour, nor rapacity, nor wickedness . . . nor what is unbearable . . . nor the hunter, nor dissimulation. . . . As all is of the form of Existence, *Sat-Chit-Ananda*, or Existence, Consciousness and Bliss alone exists.[49]

> . . . Such a one, even when engaged in meditation, is disturbed by the organs of his senses being incapable of controlling them, he not having realized that apart from the Brahman they exist not. Even after controlling them with all his might, he finds himself subjected to other impediments. His body is afflicted with cold and heat, ease and torment, and such-like pairs of opposites, as well as various types of mental anguish. . . . Hence *Jnana* (of the suprious variety) and detachment (arising therefrom) contributes merely to the weariness of the *Jiva*. The man of such *Jnana* is disturbed out of his meditation, the moment that an ant begins to crawl on his body. Could such a one become verily an enjoyer of happiness, should he be stung by a scorpion or even terminate his bodily existence? How could that be? Hence those are fools who with an array of false arguments around them do not really know the Brahman, as they hug hard the delusion that, apart from the Brahman, there is their own body, meditation, obstacles to be avoided and so on.
>
> When one's egoism is lost, even his body is verily lost. Is there further need to say that his diseases are likewise lost? To whom would affliction be caused by water, fire, wounds inflicted by weapons and the like? According as egoism in one waxes or wanes, on account of such false attachment to the body leading to the conception, 'I am the body,' his mental attitude, 'I am the Brahman,' and other real conceptions perish, and diseases and other torments set on him. There is no effect produced wheresoever without a cause. So also, how can there be affliction in the body without individuality?[50]

[49] *Tejo-Bindupanishad*, VI. 3-30.

[50] *Yogashikhopanishad*, I. 27-37.

. . . Having known the real form of one's own Atman, that Bliss of the Brahman, the non-dual, that is devoid of qualities, that is Truth and full Consciousness, one does not scent danger from any quarter whatsoever. The stand taken by knowers of the Brahman is as follows: there exists the Brahman alone actually, which is absolute Consciousness, all-pervading, eternal, full, and which is imperishable Bliss and nought else exists. The phenomenal world is, to an ignorant man, filled with a flood of misery, while, to a wise man, it is full of Bliss. To a blind man the world is dark, while to men of clear vision it is bright.[51]

At no time can the One entity verily assume diverse forms. For the reason that there is none else whatever besides me, for that very reason I am the indivisible alone. Whatever is seen or heard of, that cannot be other than the Brahman. That one entity which is eternal, hallowed and emancipated, the indivisible Bliss, the One without a Second, the endless Truth and Knowledge, that *Parabrahman* do I become. I am of the form of Bliss. I am the indivisible consciousness. I am the most exalted among the most exalted, the manifestation of firm consciousness. Even as clouds do not touch the *Akasha* (where they float), so also the sorrows of wordly existence do not touch me. Know that all is Bliss, as all sorrow has been completely obliterated. Also know that everything is of the form of existence, as falsehood has altogether been obliterated. It is the form of consciousness alone, which is possessed of reflection. Hence this form of mine is indivisible. Birth, death, going and returning, do not exist. Impurity and purity there are nought, nor pain. To the most accomplished *Yogin* everything shines out more distinctly, as being filled with consciousness.[52]

The man of fortitude (the *Jivanmukta*), does not grieve, having arrived at the conclusion, 'I do not die, nor do I live. I am neither existence, nor am of the character of non-existence. I am not in the least sentience.' He does not grieve, having assumed the attitude, 'I am smearless. I am devoid of dotage, devoid of passion, with my *Vasana*-s abated. I am limbless. I am verily the ether of sentience.' He does not grieve, possessed of the firm conviction, 'I am pure, enlightened, and devoid of dotage and death. I am tranquillized. I am the radiance of the tranquillized and equipoised state.' He does not grieve, holding as he does the opinion, 'I am that alone, which stands at the tip of a blade of grass, in the ethereal regions, in the sun, among men, among the *Naga*-s (of the nether world) and the immortal celestial beings.'[53]

From the point of view of the tradition we cannot just stop at perceiving this matter intellectually, as a matter of tautologies and deductions from tautologies. Intellectual perception will not do as a soporophic. The whole

[53]*Anna-Purnopanishad*, V. 91-4.

[51]... *Ibid.*, III, 1-5.

point is to internalize the tautology, to take it into one's very being. This admonition of the tradition is nothing but a demand that we hypnotize ourselves, that we numb the faculties by which we perceive pain and privation. Our philosophers teach us, as Marx and Engels would say, "the art of converting real objective chains that exist outside me into merely ideal, merely subjective chains, existing merely *in me* and thus of converting all external sensuously perceptible struggles into pure struggles of thought."[54]

Now, we can clearly see why the tradition is so keen to have us suppress or supersede our senses: this self-hypnosis is not possible, this self-induced swoon is not possible as long as the senses are around. Therefore, their suppression, their numbing becomes the first order of the day.

These notions—not very commendable in themselves—enter popular religion and through it the popular consciousness in an even more corrupt and vulgar form. In this religion the responsibility is fixed even more unambiguously on the individual coupled now—as in early Vedic lore—with the wrath of gods. Later the gods—such as Varuna—become the keepers of the *Karma*-ledger. This reinforces my responsibility for my state. And it also opens the way for *upayas* of all kinds. For the cause of suffering is now my own conduct and the judgment of the super-mundane, of the gods. In popular religion the gods can be appeased by rituals, rites, observances, wearing auspicious stones and marks.

The *upayas* are non-falsifiable. Empirical evidence can never prove them important. To alleviate my suffering someone tells me to perform such and such rituals, to wear some stone or some mark. If, for whatever reason, my suffering diminishes, the credit, of course, goes to the ritual, the stone or the mark. But what if it continues unabated? What if it actually becomes more intense? Well, that doesn't prove anything about the *upaya*; but for the ritual, but for the stone or the mark, I am told, things would have become even worse than they have actually become. Moreover, the responsibility for the *upaya* not having been effective is also mine. The fact that my suffering was not alleviated by it shows either that *my* past *karma* have been just too bad to be compensated for by even such potent antidotes or that *I* do not have sufficient faith and devotion in the deity, the ritual, the stone or the mark. "Otherwise why should the *upaya* not have worked?"

The tautologous philosophical proposition has now become a non-falsifiable prescription. If, for reasons that have nothing to do with the *upaya*, my suffering happens to abate and this happens to follow my recourse to the *upaya*, it leaves me weaker, more dependent, more superstitious. If it does not, it leaves me feeling guilty, it leaves me convinced that I am more at fault than I realize, that I have done so much wrong that what works for others is not sufficient to help me, it leaves me convinced that I lack faith and devotion.

[54]K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Holy Family*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, pp. 97, 226.

When man has realized that his transgressions are infinite crimes against God he can be sure of salvation and mercy only if he gives himself wholly up to God and becomes wholly dead to the world and worldly concerns. When Fleu de Marie realizes that her delivery from her inhuman situation in life was a miracle of God she herself has to become a saint in order to be worthy of such a miracle. Her human love must be transformed into religious love, the striving for happiness into striving for eternal bliss, worldly satisfaction into holy hope, communion with people into communion with God. God must take her entirely. *She herself reveals to us why He does not take her entirely. She has not yet given herself entirely to Him,* her heart is still preoccupied and engaged with earthly affairs. This is the last flickering of her strong nature. She gives herself entirely up to God by becoming wholly dead to the world and entering a convent.[55]

Three implications of this conception of suffering and of the way to alleviate it must by now have suggested themselves to the reader.

First, as *I* am the cause of my suffering (for instance, through my *karma*), as the cause of suffering is *in* me (*e.g.*, the *avidya* that clouds my mind) the effort that has to be made to conquer it is an introspective, inner-directed effort. Again and again I am told, in effect, that what I require is a different way of looking at things, a different pair of spectacles, so to say; moreover, I am told that this is all I require for overcoming what I today consider as suffering and pain and privation.

> The mind becomes bound through the fixed idea, 'I am not the Brahman.' The mind (likewise) is liberated through the fixed idea, 'All is the Brahman.' By conducting oneself in accord with the notions, 'I am lean, I am subject to misery, I am possessed of hands, feet and other limbs,' one gets bound. By conducting oneself, in accord with the notions, 'I am not subject to misery, this body is not mine, what bondage could there be in the Atman of this (individual)?'—one gets liberated. 'I am not the flesh, nor the bones, I am the *Paramatman*, that is apart from the body,' he who is inwardly convinced in this manner, rid of his ignorance, is liberated . . . .[56]

My past *Karma* entangle me in nescience, says Ramanuja, mouthing the received doctrine of the Upanishads, and this in turn leads me to view this world as being full of suffering and pain. When my nescience is destroyed the soul begins to see the *same* world "as lying within the intuition of Brahman. . .and (which) hence (is) essentially blissful."[57] Therefore, the opera-

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 206.

[56] *Mahopanishad*, 4. 122-125.

[57] *Vedanta-Sutras With Ramanuja's Commentary*, G. Thibaut (tr.), *Sacred Books of the East*, Max Mueller (ed.), Vol. XLVIII, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1971 reprint, p. 306.

tional inference is that I must change *my* perception, that I must change "myself in myself." This is what the tradition counsels instead, for instance, of urging me to join others to change the empirical reality that holds all of us in its thrall, a reality that I can only change in association with others. Having first taught me that my relations with my fellow-men are unimportant, even non-existent, the doctrine now tells me that I must endeavour alone, that I must endeavour *in* my head, *in* myself.

The second fact to notice is that the concept of alleviation of suffering, of liberation, of, say, the *Jivanmukta*, is one that is entirely compatible with the unabated continuance of empirical privation. The empirical circumstances and relations that impale one continue as they are, the privations of my fellow-men continue as they are, it is just that my way of looking at them changes, that I learn to look "through" them, to look "behind" or "beyond" them. Having declared that the world is just pure consciousness, the philosopher now tells us that it can be conquered in pure consciousness.

Once again we see the vulgar reflection of this philosophical proposition in popular religion; there expiation takes the form of rituals, pilgrimages, alms to the Brahmins—steps that leave the one who was sinned against exactly where he was, that is, it leaves him reeling under my "sin."

The third implication has already been foreshadowed: the concept of suffering as well as the concept of what is an efficacious way of dealing with it saturates the individual with guilt. It is *my avidya* in not seeing my identity with the Brahman, *my karma*, *my* inability to comprehend His purpose that accounts for my suffering; it is *my* inadequate faith, *my* insufficient devotion, *my* lack of sincerity which renders the *upayas* ineffective. The tradition itself—and specially its vulgarization in popular religion and social mores—drills these notions into the psyche till, as Marx and Engels would say, "continual hypochondriacal self-torture" becomes a habit, till it becomes almost a duty.[58] The absence of an organized church only helps to drive the drills farther down. For in its absence I am left with the one monitor I cannot escape for even a single moment—namely, *myself*, a twenty-four hour, life-long monitor reminding me at every moment about my past *Karma*, my *avidya*, my lack of faith.

The service this entire sequence does to the rulers is inestimable. For it is when I am completely burdened with guilt that I am completely ready to follow authority.

III. MAN'S GOAL

The Atman having been cabined in this earthen-pot of a body, the goal for man is to break out of this cycle of birth and death and to merge back into the Brahman.

[58] Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

Ishrate-katra hai dariya mein fana hona . . . .

This goal, as we saw at the beginning of Chapter 5, is affirmed again and again.

Two aspects of this goal are noteworthy: it is a transcendental goal in the sense that it concerns an existence other than our day-to-day empirical existence and, secondly, it is an exclusive goal, it is, the Upanishads teach us again and again, the only goal worth pursuing. Each of these aspects of the goal has several consequences.

Every worldly act—save perhaps those that are required exclusively for physical survival and those also only till we need our bodies for pursuing the goal—every worldly act becomes a lapse.[59] As almost all of us continue to engage in acts of this world, we are continually open to the charge of failing to do what is right. Guilt, the same "continual hypochondriacal self-torture" is driven deeper.

Nothing is now done for the joy of it. Every act, even of eating and defecating, has to be and is done for some higher purpose. Marriage is not for companionship but for procreation. Procreation is not for the joy of having children around one but because the son is necessary for the last rites or for propitiating the soul after death, because giving the daughter away in marriage will increase my stock of *punya*. Nature is admired not because of its intrinsic beauty but because it is proof of His great creativity. A woman too is now not a companion but—even in the Tantric tradition in which she has a higher status than in other schools—a *"padarth,"* a substance I need for pursuing the goal of merging with Brahman.

The exclusive, Absolute goal enters daily life as obssessive religiosity. Stones, places, trees, days, relics, visionaries, scraps of paper, idols, pictures, all become holy. It would be a mistake to think that this elevates them, that it now means that the care we would lavish on the Divine, we now shower on an ever-widening circle of things and beings. The mundane is not being raised; the Divine is being brought down. Ultimately the profane is pursued on the pretext of pursuing the Divine. The pursuit of the Divine gets bogged down in mere externalism—in images and amulets and pilgrimages and rituals—and the holy objects themselves become too commonplace for holiness to be deeply felt.[60]

Thus, the goal, the transcendental, incessantly proclaimed goal, is not able to wean people away from mundane conduct. But it forces them to camouflage whatever it is that they are doing. It drives hypocrisy into our very being.

The exclusivity of the goal—an exclusivity that follows directly from the uncompromising view of reality as pure consciousness—has other conse-

[59] I shall examine this matter in detail in the next chapter.

[60] We can see all these symptoms in contemporary India. For a classic account of this sequence in ... see J. Huizenga, *The Waning of the* ...

quences too. The goal, as is obvious, is transcendental. The incessant reaffirmation of the goal postpones resolution of our earthly conflicts, the settling of our earthly scores to the hereafter. Instead of working for resolving matters and settling scores here and now the effort is either postponed or it is directed into devices that are alleged to resolve matters in the ultimate reality itself. Moreover, for the down and out, for those who have been so crushed that they have e en scaled down their hopes, the transcendental goal—with its affirmations of an equality that does not now exist, with its evocative associations with the hereafter of *Ananda*, tranquillity, freedom, a languorous peace—the goal in fact soon becomes a "sphere of compensation," a soporific.

"But isn't it good that the tradition offers solace and peace to the unfortunate, to the crushed? Is it not something to hold their hand, to make it possible for them to put up with what is unbearable?"

No. It is one thing to administer morphine to an individual patient who cannot bear the pain and it is quite another to put an entire populace on to opium. Sentimentality in this case is entirely misplaced. It is as if a score of men carrying an enormous boulder were to have slipped and are now lying under the boulder, each in great agony. A passerby notices their plight. He realizes in a flash that help is too far to summon and also that he cannot lift away the boulder on his own. He sees that if he were to help each of the individuals adjust his positions a little bit, he and all of them together could then move the boulder away. But, overwhelmed by the immediate agony of each, instead of helping them adjust their hands and feet, he administers opium to all of them on the compassionate reasoning that this would help them at least forget their pain for a while. They do fall off into a stupor but the boulder stays precisely where it was.

Two separate points are involved here and they will perhaps be more palatable for the reader sensitive about our Hindu heritage if I make them by reference to other traditions than our own. The first concerns the effects that the doctrine has for the group as a whole and the second concerns the question whether administering the soporofic is good even for the individual.

Consider for a moment the current debate among Western psychotherapists. The point is being made that psychotherapy as it has developed only helps individuals—if it helps at all—to adjust better to what is itself a sick society, and in the process it disables them or at least keeps them from changing the reality that surrounds and traps them all. The prevalent psychotherapy has, therefore, been aptly characterized as "conformist."

A concern for relieving the suffering of an individual is legitimate. It may well be that a particular course of therapy—whether this involves chanting a *Mantra* or taking drugs or talking things over with a therapist, a priest, or one's peers—helps an individual. It may also be that the only practical course in treating an individual is to abstract him, his family or his immediate network from society as a whole and to deal only with the nexus of relationships that immediately and directly affect him. The therapist or the

priest may, for instance, deal with the individual's family as if it were the "cause" of his problems—rather than, for instance, looking upon it as itself being a victim of an oppressive social system. But decisions such as these are just pragmatic decisions that may or may not be helpful in an individual case.

The therapy may "work" for the individual in the sense that it may help him adapt to or forget the social reality which he, as an isolated individual, cannot change. And in this sense the therapy can be said to have an immediate, pragmatic justification.

But we should not let that obscure the fact that the therapy will leave unchanged the social reality that creates and recreates and will continue to create and recreate similar miseries for millions. Indeed, the therapy—even as it helps the particular individual adapt to or forget his immediate problem—may well help perpetuate and entrench the social reality; when the particular, conformist, therapy comes to be so widely adopted that it actually reconciles a large enough number of individuals to things as they are, it would have effectively foreclosed change.

Once we realize that suffering is real and that many of its roots are in the man-made social world, then that therapy alone is valid which makes the individual a better agent for changing that man-made social world. Such therapy would proceed on the following premises: those who are suffering most need the cure most; the cure can only take the form of meaningful, significant activity—activity that, as Frankl would say, endows their lives with meaning; for activity to endow man's life with meaning, its object must transcend man's narrow, immediate, selfish concerns; thus the therapy must show the "sick," the suffering, the relation that their individual "sickness" or suffering has to the malaise of their society as a whole and it must put them to changing the society; thus, revolutionary praxis and not doling out soporifics to individuals is the valid therapy.[61]

The second point concerns the individual himself—what the tradition prescribes as a soporific for the incurable ends up strengthening inertia in general. Once again, an observation made in another context about another tradition may help the reader sensitive about the virtues of our tradition see the point better:

> Theodicy belongs to the field of popular philosophy of everyday life . . . . A person who has suffered an irreparable misfortune can find consolation in the thought that God's unerring finger has designated his misery to create in this world some good unknown to him; or else in the thought that nothing in human history happens without a reason, nothing is wasted, and every torment of the individual is scrupulously entered in the ledgers of the bank of history and enriches the account from which

[61] Readers interested in pursuing this parallel will find Russell Jacoby, *Social Amnesia*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1975, and Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1962, useful starting points.

future generations will draw interest. Those who can take such convictions to heart can certainly derive great benefits from them, and there would be no reason to rob them of this source of comfort if they did not apply it as well to reversible misfortunes or to evils which can be opposed. But most often theodicies do serve in just such situations. The conviction that by the will of God or of history nothing in human life is in vain is so powerful an encouragement to our innate inertia and such a sanctification of our conservatism and laziness that in practical life it shields inertia against pangs of conscience and rational criticism . . . . Theodicy is, therefore, a method of transforming facts into values; that is, a method through which a fact becomes not what it appears to be empirically, but an element in a teleological order that bestows special significance on all its components. To perceive values in facts is without doubt a legacy from magical thinking, older than speculative philosophies, which assumes a belief in the sanctifying or damning power of certain events, unrelated to their empirical characteristics but derived from their invisible attributes. The conviction that our current and real suffering must have its counterpart in future good presupposes a belief in certain invisible, secret qualities of unpleasant events, qualities that are bound to the wise order of the universe and take on value from it. This conviction is of the same type as any belief in magic . . . .[62]

Just as the twin aspects of the goal—its transcendental and its exclusive character—breed inertia in the oppressed as far as changing the empirical, man made world is concerned, it rationalizes callousness in the oppressor. The call to detachment, as we shall see later, becomes a cover for sheer disregard for the sufferings of others, vulgar notions of *karma* are a handy balm for the well-off: "the wretched poor must have done much evil to be where they are; after all, Varuna—the great ledger-keeper—has himself placed them down there; and, in any case, nothing I am doing, nothing I *can* do, can prevent them from pursuing the only goal that is worthwhile—namely, breaking out of the cycle of birth and death, of merging into Brahman, quite the contrary, even if I grant you that I am oppressing them, that I am exploiting them, their privation is not all bad; by turning their minds to Brahman it may even get them to Him before I get there myself! In any case, have you not seen the temple I have built for them?"

The exclusive emphasis on the transcendental, spiritual goal, the exclusive emphasis on the spirituality of the quest, the emphasis on inner-directed means, all conspire to deny the significance of those who, out of the circumstances in which they are placed, have no option but to toil with their hands, who have no option but to spend all their waking hours toiling away with one single obsession—how to get the next meal. How can they be well-regarded when they spend all their waking hours in an activity that has no

[62] L. Kolakowski, "The Priest and the Jester" in *Marxism & Beyond*, Paladin, London, 1971, pp. 35-36.

relation to the only means—the inner-directed means—that are worthwhile? How can they be well-regarded when their singular obsession—of warding starvation off—has nothing to do with the only goal that is worthwhile, namely merging in Brahman?

The entire doctrine reflects the deep schism between producers and parasites that seems to have developed so early in our society and that had millenia in which to congeal and harden. Is it at all surprising then that the operational implications of the doctrine were precisely the ones that would suit the rulers? What could be more helpful to the rulers than that the oppressed toilers should leave empirical conditions and relations as they are and should instead hypnotize themselves into believing that the only way for them to alleviate their suffering is to learn to look at it in another way? As Faiz would say,

Mujhse kehtein hain chaman vale, aye gharibane—chaman
Tum koyi achcha sa rakh lo apne veerane ka naam . . . .

7

CONSEQUENCES–II: PRACTICE

As empirical beings do not exist, or as the empirical aspect of their being is not important, empirical relations among men cannot exist or at least they cannot be significant. The question of devoting one's time and effort to transforming them, therefore, does not arise. Indeed, the position is even worse. I shall argue in this chapter that not only does the tradition leave no room for work aimed at transforming the social reality around us, it leaves little room for work, for deeds, *per se*. Similarly, as Schweitzer once noted, one is hard put to deriving any notions of responsibility towards others, of ethics, from the undiluted form of the doctrine.

I. WORK

Now it is true that sometimes—though the occasions are lamentably few—one comes across a stray passage or two that asserts that work is a means for attaining Brahman.

> Austerity, restraint, and work are the foundation of it (*i.e.*, the mystic doctrine). The Vedas are all its limbs. Truth is its abode. . . .[1]

> This *Parameshvara* is attainable only by him by whom many meritorious deeds have been done. . . .[2]

> Even while doing deeds here, one may desire to live for a hundred years.[3]

> This person who performs works is the best of those who know Brahman.[4] The works that are not blameworthy are to be resorted to, but not the others. Those acts of ours which are commendable are to be followed by you but not the others.[5]

> The transconscious, inartificial dissolution of the mind, they know as *Yoga*. Do thy deeds, taking thy stand on such *Yoga*, but never do (them) in an insipid manner. . . . He takes actions with a lofty purpose, worthy

[1] *Kenopanishad*, 33.
[2] *Sharabhopanishad*, 2.
[3] *Ishopanishad*, 2.
[4] *Mundakopanishad*, 3.1.4.
[5] *Taittiriyopanishad*, 1.11.2.

of being dedicated unto *Ishvara* and delights in them every day, but always hesitates about doing vulgar and stupid deeds. He does not enter into discourses (with others) on vulnerable points and devotes himself to righteous causes. He sets about his tasks in a gentle manner, without causing distress to others, is ever afraid of sinful actions, does not hanker after enjoyment and makes use of words replete with friendly and affectionate sentiments, soft and appropriate, and suited to the place, time (and occasion), (in conversation). He makes himself useful to the virtuous, by thought, deed and word. . . .[6]

Similarly, the *Brahma-Sutra*-s urge us to perform the duties that have been prescribed for our caste and our age on the grounds, first, that they have been prescribed by the *Shruti* and the *Smriti* (*Sutra*, 3.4.32) and, second, that they are a means to knowledge (*Sutra*, 3.4,33). The conventional virtues like self-control, etc., too are commended on the ground of their being "subsidiaries of knowledge" (*Sutra*, 3.4,27). The *Gita*, as is well known, also urges *Karma* on the grounds, among others, that deeds contribute to the knowledge of the non-dual Brahman. In *Gita* (5.5) Krishna tells Arjuna, "That state which is reached by the Sankhyas is reached by the Yogins also"; while in (4.10) He speaks of the self being "purified by the fire of wisdom," in (5.11) He says that *Yogin*-s perform action without attachment to fruit "by the body, by *the mind, by the intellect, by mere senses also for* the purification of the Self"; similarly, having talked of *Bhakti* and devotion as a means, He tells Arjuna (in 18.46) that we may worship Him by performing our assigned duties.

Similarly, given the view that rebirth is ruination, the affirmations that one's rebirth is conditioned by one's *Karma* can be said to urge virtuous conduct by implication.

'Yajnavalkya,' said He, 'when the voice of a dead man goes into fire, his breath into the wind, his eye into the sun, his mind into the moon, his hearing into the quarters of heaven, his body into the earth, his soul into space, the hairs of his head into plants, the hairs of his body into trees, and his blood and semen are placed in water, what then becomes of this person?'
'Artabhaga, my dear, take my hand. We two only will know of this. This is not for us two (to speak of) in public.'
The two went away and deliberated. What they said was, *Karma*. What they praised was, *Karma*. Verily, one becomes good by good action, bad by bad action.

Thereupon Jaratkarava Artabhaga held his peace. . . .[7]

According as one acts, according as one conducts himself, so does he become. The doer of good becomes good. The doer of evil becomes evil One becomes virtuous by virtuous action, bad by bad action.

But people say: 'A person is made (not of acts, but) of desires only. (In reply to this I say) As is his desire, such is his resolve; as is his resolve such is the action he performs; what action he performs, that he procures for himself. . . .[8]

Then he said: 'Those who, verily, depart from this world—to the moon in truth, they all go. During the earlier half it thrives on their breathing spirits; with the latter half it causes them to be reproduced. This, verily is the door of the heavenly world—that is, the moon. Whoever answers it not, him, having become rain, it rains down here. Either as a worm, or as a moth, or as a fish, or as a bird, or as a lion, or as a wild boar, or as a snake, or as a tiger, or as a person, or some other in this or that condition, he is born again here according to his deeds, according to his knowledge. . . .[9]

Now, rising upward through one of these (channels) the up-breath leads in consequence of good work to the good world; in consequence of evil to the evil world; in consequence of both, to the world of men. . . . Whatever is one's thinking, therewith he enters into life. His life joined with his heat, together with the self, leads to whatever world has been fashioned (in thought). . . .[10]

Accordingly, those who are of pleasant conduct here—the prospect is, indeed, that they will enter a pleasant womb. . . . But those who are of a stinking conduct here—the prospect is, indeed, that they will enter a stinking womb. . . .[11]

Some go into a womb
For the embodiment of a corporeal being,
Others go into a stationary thing
According to their deeds, according to their knowledge.[12]

Whoever has qualities is the doer of deeds that bring recompense;
And of such action surely he experiences the consequence.
Undergoing all forms characterized by the three *gunas*, treading the three paths,
The individual self roams about according to its *karma*. . . Coarse or fine many in number

[8] *Ibid.*, IV. 4. 5.
[9] *Kaushitakeyopanishad*, 1. 2.
[10] *Prashnopanishad*, 3. 7, 10; see also *ibid.*, 1. 9, 10.
[11] *Chandogyopanishad*, 5.10. 7; see also Mait...
[12] *Kathopanish*...

The embodied one chooses forms according to his own qualities
(Each) subsequent cause of his union with them is seen to be
Because of the quality of his acts and of himself.[13]

The *Gita*, as is well known, repeats this refrain often. Thus, (in 9.25), for instance, Krishna tells Arjuna that one reaps as one sows, "Votaries of the Gods go to the Gods; to the *Pitris* go the worshippers of the *Pitris*; to the *Bhutas* go the worshippers of the *Bhutas*; My worshippers come to me." Occasionally, therefore, the *Brahma-Sutra*-s too speak of good deeds yielding good results,[14] of one's *Karma* being dependent on one's conduct,[15] of *karma* being destroyed by one's voluntary effort.[16]

By their affirmations that results follow works the texts can be taken to be urging good works.

Passages and reasons such as the ones that have just been cited notwithstanding, I fear that the tradition taken as a whole leaves little room for work and even less for work aimed at transforming the empirical world around us. Scores of passages that specifically ask us to turn our face away from works can be cited—although these are the less important part of the argument against busying oneself with deeds.

Not by sight is It grasped, not even by speech,
Not by any other sense-organs, austerity, or work.
By the peace of knowledge, one's nature purified—
In that way, however, by meditating, one does behold
Him who is without parts. . . .[17]

Hence it has been said, that the liberation, through attaining the state of aloneness with the Brahman, is possible for all, through knowledge (of the Brahman) alone and not through *Karma*, nor through the enumeration of the twenty-five *Tattva*-s, nor through the difficult path of Yoga, nor through mere ceremonial worship and the like; thus the Upanishad. . . .[18]

Brahma, the grandsire said to him (Asvalayana): 'Seek to know (Brahman) by faith, devotion, meditation and concentration. Not by work, not by offspring, or wealth; only by renunciation does one reach life eternal . . . .[19]

The destruction of worldly existence could be successfully accomplished through knowledge alone and not through actions and austerities. . . .[20]

[13] *Shvetashvataropanishad*, 5. 7, 12.
[14] For instance, *Brahma-Sutras*, 3.2. 38–41.
[15] *Ibid.*, 3.1.10.
[16] *Ibid.*, 3.3.28.
[17] *Mundakopanishad*, 3.1.8.
[18] *Muktikopanishad*, 1.6.7.
[19] *Kaivalyopanishad*, 2; similar passages occur often, for instance, [illegible], 16, and *Katharudropanishad*, 13.
[20] [illegible], 33-37

Passages such as these can be multiplied many times over. But instead of setting up a competition as to which side can cite the larger number of passages, we should look at the logical implications of the basic view that the Upanishads take regarding means, we should look at the terms they use to describe the ideal state of the aspirant and then ask ourselves whether the position on means as well as the numerous descriptions of the ideal state to which the *yogin* should aspire, whether these leave any scope for action, to say nothing of whether they leave any scope for socially relevant action.

First, as we have seen at considerable length in earlier chapters, the Upanishads declare the world to be unreal. If the world isn't there at all, if neither the doer nor the object of the deed is at all existent, then where is the question of performing duties, of doing deeds? "If the self knows itself as 'I am this'," asks the *Brihad-Aranayakopanishad*, "then desiring what and for whose sake will he suffer in the wake of the body?"[21] This question and the attitude implicit in it is echoed again and again in the Upanishads.

> Wherefor shall I suffer, who am filled with Supreme Bliss? Let those who yearn to go to the other worlds perform rituals. What shall I, who am of the nature of all the worlds, perform? For what and how? Let those who are qualified interpret the *Shastra*-s or teach the Vedas. I have no such qualification, since I am free of action.... I partake not of worldly duties superimposed (on me) by others....[22]

> Having scrutinized the worlds that are built up by work, a Brahmin should arrive at indifference. The (world) that was not made is not (won) by what is done....[23]

> He who seeks (shelter in) the Atman with the firm conviction 'I am the Atman devoid of dotage, I am the Atman devoid of death', for him who is firmly convinced of such Atman, where is (scope for) the thought of *Prarabdha* (*Karma*)? When one takes his stand on the conviction that his body is his Atman, then will *Prarabdha* prevail. The conception of the body as the Atman, is not desirable. Hence, let *Prarabdha* be given up. This very attribution of *Prarabdha* to the body would prove to be a delusion. Whence can truth be derived out of false attribution? How can there be the coming into existence of what does not exist? How can there be the destruction of what is unborn? How can there be the commencement of what does not exist? Could the dissolution, root and branch, of the results of ignorance be brought about, through the knowledge (of the non-differentiated Brahman), how can this body then remain? It is with a view to satisfying the dull-witted who harbour the aforesaid doubt, that the Holy-writ talks of *Prarabdha*, in an external sense, and verily not

[21] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, 4.4.12.
[22] *Avadhutopanishad*, 14-17.
[23] *Mundakopanishad*, 1-2.12.

to induce belief in the wise, about the existence of the body and the like. . . .[24]

Second, when the existence of the world is acknowledged, the world, indeed the entire cosmos, is pictured as being driven by an inexorable law. Even in the *Gita*, even as He is exhorting Arjuna to fight, does Krishna not tell him that it is He who sets all beings whirling on a machine?[25] Does He not tell him that everything and every being acts according to its *Prakriti*, according to the three *gunas*?[26] Does He not tell him, "Even a wise man acts according to his nature, all creatures follow their nature, what then," does He not ask, "will constraint avail?"[27] Does He not warn Arjuna in the end, "If obsessed by the sense of 'I,' you think, 'I will not fight,' vain is thy obsession; your nature will compel you. What you will not to do, O Kaunteya, because of your delusion, you shall do, even against your will, bound as you are by the duty to which you are born."[28] Such are the reminders of determinism, of the extremely limited scope for volitional acts that occur in the most activist of texts in the tradition.

The third point to notice is that the rewards that the texts promise for works are, almost invariably, inferior and transient. The supreme reward is reserved by them for the course that has been sketched earlier—withdrawal from activities. . . attenuation of the mind. . . the knowledge of oneness with Brahman. The basic position on this matter is stated by the *Chandogyopanishad*. In passages that are echoed often, and which we shall have occasion to examine again in the next chapter, the *Chandogya* describes how those who attain the great knowledge.

pass into the flame; from the flame, into the day; from the day, into the half-month of the waxing moon; from the half-month of the waxing moon, into the six months during which the sun moves northward; from those months, into the year; from the year, into the sun; from the sun, into the moon, into the lightning. There there is a Person who is non-human. He leads them on to Brahma. This is the way leading to the gods.

But those who in the village reverence a belief in sacrifice, merit, and alms-giving—they pass into the smoke; from the smoke, into the night; from the night, into the latter half of the month; from the latter half of the month, into the six months during which the sun moves southward—these do not reach the year; from those months, into the world of the fathers; from the world of the fathers, into space; from space, into the moon. That is the King Soma. That is the food of the gods. The gods eat that.

After having remained in it as long as there is a residue (of their good works), by that course by which they came they return again, just as they

[24] *Adhyatmopanishad*, 53-60.
[25] *Gita*.
[26] *Ibid*.
[27] *Ibid*., 3.33.
[28] *Ibid*., 18.59, 60.

Passages such as these can be multiplied many times over. But instead of setting up a competition as to which side can cite the larger number of passages, we should look at the logical implications of the basic view that the Upanishads take regarding means, we should look at the terms they use to describe the ideal state of the aspirant and then ask ourselves whether the position on means as well as the numerous descriptions of the ideal state to which the *yogin* should aspire, whether these leave any scope for action, to say nothing of whether they leave any scope for socially relevant action.

First, as we have seen at considerable length in earlier chapters, the Upanishads declare the world to be unreal. If the world isn't there at all, if neither the doer nor the object of the deed is at all existent, then where is the question of performing duties, of doing deeds? "If the self knows itself as 'I am this'," asks the *Brihad-Aranayakopanishad*, "then desiring what and for whose sake will he suffer in the wake of the body?"[21] This question and the attitude implicit in it is echoed again and again in the Upanishads.

> Wherefor shall I suffer, who am filled with Supreme Bliss? Let those who yearn to go to the other worlds perform rituals. What shall I, who am of the nature of all the worlds, perform? For what and how? Let those who are qualified interpret the *Shastra*-s or teach the Vedas. I have no such qualification, since I am free of action.... I partake not of worldly duties superimposed (on me) by others....[22]

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[21] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, 4.4.12.
[23] *Mundakopanishad*, 1-2.12.
[22] *Avadhutopanishad*, 14-17.

(relating to the existence or non-existence of things apart from the Atman), attains the state of actionlessness. The conception of the mind as the active agent, is what is known as the state of palpable (mental) impressions, which give rise to misery of all kinds. Giving up the misconception resulting from looking upon everything (apart from the Atman) as the Atman, by remaining always with the face turned inwards, everything (other than the Atman) attains the state of ether (becomes void).... [36]

This mind of thine, when freed from its feverish activity, does not plunge into the affairs of the phenomenal world, O Brahmin! even as an elephant would not, into the hollow left by the hoofs of a cow; while the niggardly mind, (not broadened through investigation), O Brahmin! will verily get drowned in such a hollow, just like a mosquito revelling in the stagnant water of the hollow of the hoofs of a cow, wherefrom it had its origin.... [37]

(He is a *Jivan-mukta*), who is possessed of a firm intellect; whose bliss is in the ascendant; who is acceptable to all (adapting himself to the idiosyncracies of others); who is known for his righteousness; who has superior wisdom; before whom the sweet (Brahman) has manifested ite self; who, on account of his daily practice in the knowledge of th- Brahman, has vacated his mind of everything but the Atman. When, by the strength of practice, the throbbing of the vital airs has been attenuated to the point of extinction, and (the throbbing of) the mind (dependent thereon) meets with repose, there remains the state of *Nirvana*.... [38]

He who gives up all action, ever contented and having no (ostensible) support, is not smeared, either with religious merit, or sin, or anything else. Even as a crystal-like mirror does not become tainted from the image reflected therein, even so, the knower of that (Brahman) does not derive any inward pleasure from the fruit of his actions. He does not know of any pain or pleasure from the lopping off or the adoration of his body, or when frolicking among crowds of people, even as he would not, were they reflections (on the face of a mirror). He does not indulge in praise, nor is subject to any change, being devoid of what has to be worshipped and the act of worshipping, as he adheres to and at the same time avoids rules relating to religious or moral conduct.... The act of making a resolve is verily the cause of bondage. Do thou give up that. From the absence of resolve, there will surely be liberation. Hence do thou have recourse to such practice with intelligence. Also, when confronted with the grasping of anything that is graspable, do thou always exercise due caution, avoiding, bit by bit, all occasion for making

[36] *Anna-Purnopanishad*, I. 28-39. [37] *Ibid.*, I. 40-57. [38] *Ibid.*, II. 26-34.

a resolve. Do thou not ever become subject to the grasping tendency, nor do thou be the grasper any time. . . .[39]

Do thou remain in the state of the Atman alone, with all things annihilated, devoid of mental functions, with thy mind dissolved, and thy mental functions entirely abated; with thy Atman tranquillized, resembling a dumb, blind and deaf man, with thy face ever turned inwards, intensely pure, and full of the inward perception, through thine own Atman. O Brahmin! sleeping while yet wide awake, do thou perform the actions (prescribed by the Scriptures). Giving up all things inwardly do thou conduct thyself outwardly in accordance with the situations, as they arise . . . .[40]

The state of passivity to all things is the best posture. . . .[41]

The *Yogin* with mental control, by constant practice becomes indifferent to everything else and is attracted by such *Nada* alone as would transport him beyond his mind. Leaving off all thoughts and devoid of all action, he should meditate upon *Nada* alone. This mind will then merge completely in the *Nada*. . . .[42]

The tortoise holds within itself its hands, legs and also the head after ceasing all functioning with them and remains like a piece of stone. So also, with the orifices of the body. . . filled with the vital air at first and later emptied, the *Yogin* should remain in his body without functioning. When the nine orifices stand restrained from functioning, there will be flow of air upward through the orifice of the *Susumna* opening inwards from the *Muladhara* The *Yogin* should then perform *Kevala-kumbhaka* even as the flame of a lamp placed within a pot. The cessation of movement of air, they know as *Kumbhaka*. With the nine orifices restrained from functioning, in a secluded spot, free from all disturbance, the *Yogin* . . . will attain the conviction that while every other thing has left no trace, by the Atman alone is something left and thus attain *Videha-mukti*. . . .[43]

For the *Yogin* whose mind rests in the Brahman there is no taint of action of the form of religious rites of any kind. Indeed action of the form of ritual of any kind has to be performed at sunrise and sunset. As, for a knower of the Atman, there is no rising and setting of the Sun of Consciousness, there is absence of action in the form of rituals of all kinds. . . .[44]

[39] *Ibid.*, V. 95-106.
[40] *Trishikhibrahmanopanishad*, 28-32.
[41] *Yogatattvopanishad*, 140-142.
[42] *Mandalabrahmanopanishad*, II. [illegible]
[43] *Ibid.*, V. 112-118.
[44] *Nadabindupanishad*, 31-41.

ideal or near-ideal states for a man do they talk of a warrior in the midst of battle or do they talk of a man lost in dreamless sleep?

It is not the warrior in the heat of battle who is said to be a man "come into his own," but the man in dreamless sleep; then is he said to have reached as close as is possible for the uninitiated to the great goal, the Self.

Ajatasatru said: 'When this man fell asleep thus, where then was the person who consists of intelligence? Whence did he thus come back?'

And this also Gargya did not know.

Ajatasatru said: 'When this man has fallen asleep thus, then the person who consists of intelligence, having by the intelligence taken to himself the intelligence of these senses, rests in that place which is the space within the heart. When that person restrains the senses, that person is said to be asleep. Then the breath is restrained. The voice is restrained. The eye is restrained. The ear is restrained. The mind is restrained.

When he goes to sleep, these worlds are his. Then he becomes a great king, as it were. Then he becomes a great Brahmin, as it were. He enters the high and the low, as it were. As a great king, taking with him his people, moves around in his own country as he pleases, even so here this one, taking with him his senses, moves around in his own body as he pleases.

'Now when one falls sound asleep, when one knows nothing whatsoever, having crept out through the seventy-two thousand channels called *hita*, which lead from the heart to the pericardium, one rests in the pericardium. Verily, as a youth or a great king or a great Brahmin might rest when he has reached the summit of bliss, so this one now rests.'[51]

This, (the state of dreamless sleep) verily, is that form of his which is beyond desires, free from evil, without fear. As a man, when in the embrace of a beloved wife, knows nothing within or without, so this person, when in the embrace of the intelligent Soul, knows nothing within or without. Verily, that is his (true) form in which his desire is satisfied, in which the Soul is his desire, in which he is without desire and without sorrow....

An ocean, a seer alone without duality, becomes he whose world is Brahman, O King!—thus Yajnavalkya instructed him. This is a man's highest path. This is the highest achievement. This is the highest world. This is his highest bliss. On a part of just this bliss other creatures have their living....[52]

The *Mandukyopanishad* is no less lyrical about this state of deep sleep, when all the senses have been withdrawn, stilled, folded up.

[51]*Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, 2.1.16-19. [52]*Ibid.*, 4.3.21, 32.

If one asleep desires no desire whatsoever, sees no dream whatsoever, that is deep sleep.

The deep-sleep state, unified, just a cognition mass, consisting of bliss, enjoying bliss, whose mouth is thought, the Cognitional, is the third fourth.

This is the lord of all. This is the all-knowing. This is the inner controller. This is the source of all, for this is the origin and the end of beings.[53]

When the *Chandogyopanishad* says of a person that "he has reached his Being, he has gone to his own,"[54] when it talks of one going to the self, "the immortal, the fearless. . . Brahman. . .,"[55] is it talking of a man plunging into a struggle? No, it is talking of a man in deep, dreamless sleep.

And what is so notable about this state of deep sleep? Precisely that in it all activity has been totally stilled, precisely that in it all senses have been folded up, withdrawn, that all cognition has been obliterated. In that state, as the *Kaushitakeyopanishad* puts it, a person "becomes unitary in this breathing spirit. Then speech together with all names goes to it, the eye together with all forms goes to it, the ear together with all sounds goes to it, the mind together with all thoughts goes to it. . . ."[56]

And what is deficient about this state of deep sleep? The Upanishads allude to three features. The first is that it is not volitional. The aspirant must learn to induce a state of equivalent stillness at will. This is what the various instructions about the stages and ways of *samadhi*, etc., aim at accomplishing. Second, the Upanishads lament that the state of deep sleep is so short-lived, that soon enough one returns to the waking state. Hence, the *Chandogyopanishad* compares persons going into and coming out of deep sleep to ignorant men who again and again go over a treasure of gold without finding it.[57] Hence, a person should not just be able to go into the state of total withdrawal, of a total stilling of the senses at will; he should be able to continue in that state, unlike the man who repeatedly falls into and comes out of deep sleep. Third, the state of deep sleep is said to be insufficiently "deep," to be but an approximation to the states of even greater submergence, of even greater stillness, of even greater abstraction that must be attained. Thus it is that Upanishads like *Mandukya* and *Maitri*[58] speak of a fourth state—*Turya*—and other Upanishads speak of even more rarified states.

Here is a typical account of the progressive attenuation of all activity, of all cognition and of gradually reaching the *Turya*-state:

[53] *Mandukyopanishad* 5, 6.
[54] *Chandogyopanishad*, 6.8.1.
[55] *Ibid.*, 8.11.1. On all this also see *Brahma-Sutras* 3.2.7-10.
[56] *Kaushitakeyopanishad*, 3.3; 4.19, 20 are similar. See also *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, 4.3.19-34.
[57] *Chandogyopanishad*, 8.3.2.
[58] *Mandukyoyopanishad*, 5-7; *Maitreyopanishad*, 7.11.7-8.

. . . always observing silence and deeply meditating on his self. . . forgetting everything (else) in consonance with the absorption in his self. . . .[61]

He shall only mark time till the allotted span of life is completed; he shall neither welcome death nor rejoice in living. He shall await the time (of death) alone as a servant awaits orders.[62]

If an ascetic practises loves other than (self-realization) it is like adorning a corpse. . . .[63]

Actions entailing blessing, those connected with injury as well as those intended for the welfare of the world, these (the ascetic) shall neither perform nor cause others to perform. . . .[64]

He shall neither do nor speak anything. He shall have no thoughts, good or bad. . . .[65]

Thus having become wise and possessing complete control over the mind, turning away from desires, unclad, always discarding all worldly affairs by thought, word and deed and turning his face away from the illusory phenomenal world, (the sage) becomes liberated by deep meditation on his self according to the maxim of the wasp and the worm. . . .[66]

(The sage) deeply intent on uprooting good and bad actions. . . .[67]

An ascetic comes down (from his high position) if he has greed, anger. . . an explaining tendency. . . passion. . . (a desire to) enforcing right conduct (in others). . . .[68]

There is no duty enjoined on an ascetic. If there is, then he will have to mix with people practising religious observances (which is undesirable). Hence ascetics have the right (solely) to meditation, etc. . . . .[69]

Unattached to all beings and even to the (attainment of the) position of Brahman and uprooting tenderness towards everything, even to his

[61] *Turiyatitavadhutopanishad*, 1.
[62] *Narada-Parivrajakopanishad*, 3.61, 5.26.
[63] *Ibid.*, 5.24-6.
[64] *Ibid.*, 5.47.
[65] *Ibid.*, 5.51.
[66] *Ibid.*, 5.66. Shankara says that a worm thinking deeply on a wasp becomes a wasp itself. The Upanishads sometimes slip into asserting that the sage may as well act (*e.g.*, *Parabrahmopanishad*, 1) but then lose little time in retracing their steps (*e.g.*, *ibid.*, 14); *Paramhansaparivrajakopanishad*, 5, retraces the slip in the same passage; also compare *Sannyasopanishad*, 2.75, 2.113 and 2.117.
[67] *Yajnavalkyopanishad*, 8; *Jabalopanishad*, 6.3 is similar.
[68] *Narada-Parivrajakopanishad*, 4.5-6.
[69] *Ibid.*, 5.21

children. . . . He has neither righteous conduct nor unrighteous conduct; nor has he any rule (of conduct) nor worldly action. . . .[70]

His (the *avadhuta's*) worldly existence consists in moving about freely, with or without clothes. For him there is nothing righteous or unrighteous, nothing holy or unholy. . . .[71]

If this is to be the state of just the ascetic—who is, after all, still a mere aspirant—one can imagine how much more abstracted, how much more remote must the state be of beings who have passed beyond this state—the *Paramahansas*, the *Jivanmuktas*, the *Videha-muktas*.[72]

This overpowering insistence on progressively attenuating all activity so as to still the mind and set oneself on the road to realization has consequences that go beyond the assertions themselves. For this insistence forces us to look again at statements that, taken at face-value, seem to urge works and deeds. Consider the *Brihad-Aranyaka's* (4.45) statement quoted above, "as he acts, as he behaves, so he becomes." Now, this seems to tell us that we should plunge ourselves into good works. But, in the context of the overwhelming insistence of the Upanishads on attenuating all activity, may it not have the opposite meaning? May it not be saying that we can attain the state of actionlessness, of deep-sleep, of *Samadhi* and of all that lies beyond it only if we progressively attenuate all external and then all internal activity for "as we act, as we behave, so we become"? If we want to attain that state of quietude, of that unruffled bliss how can we do so by busying ourselves in deeds? Should we not then heed the *Brahma-Sutras* (3.3.28) when they tell us "the destruction of *Karma* occurs through voluntary effort" and thus consciously and deliberately set about attenuating our deeds?

"But you are talking of ascetics and *Sannyasis*. Withdrawal is undoubtedly urged for them. But isn't one supposed to take *sannyasa* only after having been through the previous three *ashramas* in which one has done one's bit by the world?"

As far as the Upanishads are concerned the answer is, "no." On a few occasions—but these are lamentably few—the Upanishads do talk of fulfilling the duties of the earlier *ashramas*, of discharging all of one's obligations and of taking the approval of one's relatives etc., before taking *Sannyasa*.[73] But the standard position is the one stated by *Jabalopanishad*: "After being a householder he may become a *vaanaprastha*. Having become a *vaanaaprastha* he may renounce the world (and thus become a mendicant monk). Or, alternatively, he may embrace renunciation from *brahmacharya* itself, or from the (stage of a) householder, or from the forest (-life of a

[70] *Ibid.*, 6.20-1, 38.
[71] *Avadhutopanishad*, 7.
[72] A few representative descriptions will be cited later.
[73] For instance, *Katharudropanishad*, 3; *Kundikopanishad*, 1-7; *Narada-Parivrajakopanishad*, 1.2, 2.1, 3.23; *Sannyasopanishad*, 1.1.

vaanaprastha). A person may renounce worldly life that very day on which distaste for it dawns on him whether he is one not observing the vows (before the stage of renunciation) or one observing them, whether he has undergone the prescribed ablution on completing the disciplined studentship or not, whether he is one who has discontinued maintaining the sacred fire at the death of his wife or is one who does not maintain (for other causes) the sacred fire. . . ."[74] It is this position that is reiterated again and again, almost word for word.[75]

We have thus far considered four points that dilute the occasional statements in the Upanishads that may be taken to be urging us to busy ourselves in works: first, the world is most often said to be non-existent; second, when acknowledged to exist, it is said to be so firmly in the grip of inexorable laws as to leave little room for volitional acts; third, in the overwhelming number of instances the rewards of works are declared to be inferior as well as transient; finally, stilling the mind is regarded as the first requisite and progressively attenuating all actions is regarded as the first step in this direction. We have also noted earlier that attaining Brahman is the sole and overriding goal of existence. There can, therefore, be no question of postponing the quest—the progressive journey towards actionlessness—till some age or stage in one's life is reached.

We now come to another consideration which again compels us to look upon the occasional passage urging works in a different light and this concerns the sense in which the expression "works" is used most often in the Upanishads.

When someone urges "works" to us today we are apt, almost automatically, to assume that he is asking us to engage in struggles in the real world, to engage in deeds with our fellow-men. But this is not the meaning that would have come to the minds of the authors of the Upanishads, the *Brahma-Sutra*-s etc. For them, their readers and listeners, "works" meant the rituals, sacrifices etc., prescribed in the *Purva-Mimansa*, the chants glorified in the *Sama* Veda or the *Chandogyopanishad*, they meant "the recitation of Vedas, sacrifices, gifts, penance, fasting," as the *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad* (4.4.22) refers to them. Passages that one comes across when the Upanishads talk of performing "works" or doing one's prescribed duties are apt to be of the following kind:

> The antidote, (to the effects of the deeds) assuredly, indeed, for this elemental soul (*bhutatman*) is this: study of the knowledge of the Vedas, and pursuit of one's regular duty. Pursuit of one's regular duty, in one's

[74] *Jabalopanishad*, 4.1.

[75] For instance in *Narada-Parivrajakopanishad*, 3.13-17, 3.77; *Paramahansa-Parivrajakopanishad*, 1, 2; *Yajnavalkyopanishad*, 1. The *Brahma-Sutras*, as is their wont in such matters, are equivocal. They state the *Jabalopanishad* view in *Sutras*, 3.4.15, 16 and 18 and then set it aside in *Sutras*, 3.4.19, 20, only to state later (*Sutras* 3.4.32-51) that the *ashrama* duties, while helpful, are neither necessary nor sufficient for attaining knowledge.

own stage of the religious life—that, verily, is the rule! Other rules are like a bunch of grass. With this, one tends upwards; otherwise, downwards. That is one's regular duty, which is set forth in the Vedaas. Not by transgressing one's regular duty does one come into a stage of the religious life. . . .[76]

> . . .The confining of the mind at all times to observances alone enjoined by the Scriptures, with the resolve that such observances alone ought to be followed, is what is said to be *Karma-yoga*.[77]

And what, pray, is one's "regular duty?" What are the "prescribed observances?" Here are typical enumerations:

> There are three branches of duty. Sacrifice, study of the Vedas, almsgiving—that is the first. Austerity, indeed, is the second. A student of sacred knowledge dwelling in the house of a teacher, settling himself permanently in the house of a teacher, is the third.[78]

> He who according to rule has learned the Veda from the family of a teacher, in time left over from doing work for the teacher; he who, after having come back again, in a home of his own, continues Veda-study in a clean place and produces (sons and pupils); he who has concentrated all his senses upon the Soul; he who is harmless toward all things elsewhere than at holy places—he, indeed, who lives thus throughout his length of life, reaches the Brahma-world and does not return higher again—yea, he does not return hither again![79]

And the matters that were being debated related to the correct procedures relating to these actions, the relative efficacy of the different rituals, sacrifices, etc., and, most important of all, whether all individuals were required always to observe the injunctions about performing these works.

Unless we bear this context in mind we are liable to place an unwarranted "activist" interpretation on the Upanishadic texts each time the word *Karma* occurs. Consider *Sutra*-s 3.4.32 and 33 from among the *Brahma-Sutra*-s. They read as follows: "At the same time the duties of the orders of life are to be performed (by one who does not want liberation) since these have been enjoined. And (these have to be performed, since these are enjoined as) being jointly generators of knowledge." Now, to a modern reader these *Sutras* would seem to be urging the performance of conventional duties, of one's civic duties, of fighting injustice and what have you. But those are not what the *Sutrakara* happened to be talking about. The meaning is in the

[76] *Maitreyopanishad*, IV. 3.
[77] *Trishikhibrahmopanishad*, *Mantra*, 23-8.
[78] *Chandogyopanishad*, II. 23. 1.
[79] *Ibid.*, VIII. 15; see also *Taittiriyopanishad*, I. 9 which repeatedly urges study and teaching of the Vedas.

context. He is talking of "sacrifices etc., and all religious activities" as he says in *Sutra* 3.4.26 or "religious duties" alluded to in *Sutra* 3.4.34, and these were sacrifices such as *Agnihotra*, etc. And the topic under discussion in the *Sutra*-s is the familiar one: whether everyone—here specifically those who were not hell-bent upon liberation—has compulsorily to perform the sacrifices etc., that have been ordained.

This matter can be documented at very great length indeed from the Upanishads. Instead of labouring on garnering this extensive evidence the reader can get a glimpse of the matter through a shorter but equally instructive exercise and this is to go through the *Gita* itself and notice how often it is that even this text (delivered as it is said to have been at an occasion, the waging of a rightheous war, that required deeds of a worldly kind) when it talks of action and deeds is actually talking of sacrifices, austerities, gifts, meditation and the like.

I will confine myself to just a few examples, leaving the detailed documentation as an exercise for the reader.

Consider verse 3.19, a favourite of the activist-interpreters of the *Gita*. The verse is as follows:

> Therefore, without attachment, constantly perform the action which should be done; for, performing action without attachment man reaches the Supreme.

What would be a clearer plea for plunging into deeds, for waging the just struggles, than this? But what are the deeds that the poet is talking about? Look for a moment at the preceding stanzas. The two immediately preceding stanzas are as follows:

> That man, verily, who rejoices only in the Self, who is satisfied with the Self, who is content in the Self alone—for him there is nothing to do. For him, there is here no interest whatever in what is done and what is not done. Nor is there in all beings any one he should resort to for any object.[80]

Not exactly the clarion call to action, are they? Indeed, they are exactly the kind of exhortations that occur in the *Sannyasa* Upanishads and on the basis of which Shankara and others urge complete immersion in knowledge of the Self, a complete withdrawal from worldly strife. But the stanzas that are our present concern and which tell us what exactly the poet is talking about are the preceding seven stanzas. They read as follows:

> Having first created mankind *together with sacrifices*, the *Prajapati* said, 'By this (*i.e.*, by sacrifices) shall ye propogate; let this be to you the cow of plenty. (3.10)

[80]*Gita*, 3.17, 18.

'With this (*i.e.*, sacrifices) do ye nourish the Gods, and the Gods shall nourish you; thus nourishing one another, ye shall attain the supreme Good. (3.11)

'Nourished *by the sacrifice*, the Gods shall indeed bestow on you the enjoyments ye desire'. Whoso enjoys—*without offering to Them*—Their gifts, he is verily a thief. (3.12)

The righteous, *who eat the remnant of the sacrifice*, are freed from all sins; but sin do the impious eat who cook for their own sake. (3.13)

From food creatures come forth; food from rain; rain *from sacrifice*; sacrifice from action;[81] know thou that action comes from Brahman, and that Brahman comes from the Imperishable. Therefore, the ever-pervading Brahman *ever rests in sacrifice*. (3.14-15)

He who follows not here the wheel thus set in motion, who is of sinful life, indulging in senses, he lives in vain, O son of Pritha. (3.16)

Now, action here certainly does not refer to waging righteous wars. The passages reflect first of all (in verses 3.10-12, 14-15) the importance attached to sacrifices; they reflect a belief common in primitive religions that rain is sent by Gods, that Gods are propitiated by sacrifices and that, therefore, the way to get rain to fall is to offer sacrifices to the Gods. Second, (in verses 3.12, 13) they instruct us to mingle the works antecedent to sacrifices with our eating etc., so that we, for instance, cook primarily for the sacrifice and only incidentally eat the remnants. Third, (in verses 3.10, 17, 18) they turn to a question that seemed to be a matter of hot controversy in those days and state the view, reinforced later by Shankara so forcefully, the view that the one who has realized, the knower, need have nothing to do with sacrifices, that in his case no injunctions apply. And, finally, in the verse (3.19) with which we started they say that even the others, that is those who, not being realized souls, have to perform sacrifices must perform them without hankering for the results that the texts of *Purva-Mimansa*, for instance, promise will follow upon the sacrifices. (I shall return to the reason for the last bit of advice in a moment.)

Again, consider verse 2.41: "Here, O son of *Kuru*, there is only one thought of a resolute nature. Many-branched and endless are the thoughts of the irresolute." And verse 2.47: "Thy concern is with action alone, never with results. Let not the fruit of action be thy motive, nor let thy attachment be for inaction." These too are favourites of our activist-commentators. Krishna seems to be laying down the commonsense rule for our daily deeds in 2.41—that we should aim resolutely at one target and not be distracted

[81]Compare *Manu* (3.76), "The offering thrown into the fire reaches the sun; from the sun comes rain; from rain food; and from food come all creatures."

by other desirables. Similarly, in 2.47 He seems to be reiterating His central advice, that we should not let the anxiety of success or failure unsteady our hand, rather we should concentrate on the deed alone.

But what is the "action" and "inaction" He is talking about in these verses? What are the "fruits" He is alluding to? The clue is in the intervening verses:

> No conviction of a resolute nature is formed in the mind of those who are attached to pleasures and power, and whose minds are drawn away by that flowery speech which the unwise—enamoured of Vedic utterances, declaring there is nothing else, full of desire, having merely *svarga* as their goal—utter, (a speech) which promises birth as the reward of actions and which abounds in specific acts for the attainment of pleasure and power, O son of Pritha. (2.42-4)

> The Vedas treat of the triad of *guna*-s, O Arjuna! be free from the triad of *guna*-s, free from pain, free from acquisition and preservation, ever remaining in the *Sattva*, and self-possessed. (2.45)

> The utility that there is in a well when one is enveloped by an all-spreading flood of water, the same (utility) there is in all Vedas for an enlightened Brahmin. (2.46)

The subject of discussion, therefore, is the same—the numerous sacrifices listed in the *Purva-Mimansa*—and the poet is making the points that he will stress again and again in relation to them, the very points that are made repeatedly in the Upanishads—that one should transcend the mercenary, slot-machine attitude to the numerous sacrifices and rituals that seem to have grabbed the minds of the populace; that the rewards of these sacrifices etc., as listed in the Vedic texts themselves are both inferior (*e.g.*, *Svarga* etc.) as well as transient (for rebirth follows after a while); that those who try and entice the populace into relying wholly on these sacrifices etc., by conjuring up flowery phrases from the Vedas are only misleading and distracting them; that instead of hankering after this, that and the other worldly and transient gains promised by the various sacrifices, one should have but one aim, the attainment of final release from the cycle of birth and death, the attainment of Brahman; that even in this pursuit one should concentrate solely on the actions needed to attain it and not be distracted by the prospect of obtaining or missing the result; that for the knower the rituals, sacrifices have as little use as a well in a flood. "Action" in this context means performing these sacrifices and rituals and "inaction" means desisting from them.

Consider another question: what is the *Karma* that does not bind? All action binds, says Krishna in (3.9), "*except action for the sake of sacrifice.*" And He repeats this affirmation in the next discourse: "Of the man whose attainment is gone, who is liberated, whose mind is established in knowledge, *who acts for the sake of sacrifice*—his whole action melts away." Hence is it

that Krishna says, "Action for the sake of sacrifice, do thou, O son of Kunti, perform, free from attachment." (3.9)

And what did readers and devotees like Shankara and Ramanuja understand by the word "action" in expressions such as "action for the sake of sacrifice" (3.9), or "sacrifice is what is born out of action" (3.14 or 4.32)? To them the word had the direct and simple meaning implied by the context —"action" here meant the gathering of materials and such other preparations that the active agents—priests, the sacrificers, etc.,—have to make for the sacrifice or *yajna* itself.[82]

The context and the implications are no different in verses 4.23-33. There too Krishna says that it is not enough to pledge, as many do, one sense or another, one's wealth, etc., in sacrifices or to take rigid vows about performing austerities, etc. One must consecrate one's cognition itself, the knowledge-sacrifice is the greatest, He says. For it is only when one's entire being, one's cognition and perception themselves are submerged that one will glimpse the great unity, only then, will one realize what one should realize through the sacrifice, that "Brahman is the offering, Brahman the oblation, by Brahman is the oblation poured into the fire of Brahman" (4.24). Sacrifices, the poet, following the Upanishads, says, should be a means not for obtaining this, that and the other, power, wealth, glory, etc., but of perceiving non-duality, of perceiving all to be Brahman alone.

Or, consider verse 18.2: 'Sages understand "*sannyasa*' to be the renunciation of *interested* works; the abandonment of the fruits of all works, the learned declare, is "*tyaga*".' Activist-interpreters like Tilak pounce on a verse such as this. "See," they say, "Krishna is Himself saying that *sannyasa* does not mean the *Karma sannyasa*, the complete abandonment of all actions, that Shankara and others maintained it meant. It means that we should abandon only the *interested* works, i.e., works we do out of a hankering after rewards. Similarly, *tyaga* means not the abandonment of all works but only the abandonment of the *hankering after the fruit* of those works." But, again, what are the "works" Krishna is talking about? What "works" does He want us to continue to perform without being preoccupied with their fruit? The answer can be inferred from the four verses that follow:

> That action should be abandoned as an evil, some philosophers declare; while others (declare) that *acts of sacrifice, gift and austerity* should not be given up. (18.3)

> Learn from Me the truth of this abandonment, O best of the Bharatas; abandonment, verily, has been declared to be of three kinds. (18.4)
> *Practice of worship, gift and austerity* should not be given up, it is quite necessary; *worship, gifts and austerity are the purifiers of the wise.* (18.5)

[82]See, for instance, Ramanuja's commentary on verses 3.14-16, *The Gita-Bhashya of Ramanuja*, M. R. Sampatkumaran (tr.) Vidya Press, Madras, 1969, p. 87.

> But even those actions should be performed setting aside attachment and the fruits; this, O son of Pritha, is My firm and highest belief. (18.6)

"Acts of sacrifice, gifts, austerities, practice of worship," this is what Krishna is talking about, not about conventional deeds. This is the same refrain as Krishna had used towards the conclusion of the preceding discourse:

> The word '*Sat*' is used in the sense of 'reality' and of 'goodness'; and so also, O Partha, the word '*Sat*' is used in the sense of an 'auspicious act. (17.26)

> And what does He enumerate when He talks of these "auspicious acts"? *Devotion to sacrifice, austerity and gift* is also spoken as '*Sat*'; and even action in connection with these is called '*Sat*'. (17.27)

Similarly, in verse 6.1 action and works refer to the maintenance of the sacred fires, to the performance of Agnihotra and other sacrifices. In verses 6.10-27 the enumeration of methods of concentration and meditation are referred to. In other places what are being referred to are merely those acts that are required for the bringing forth or maintenance of the body (*e.g.*, verses 4.21-23). At the commencement of the eighth discourse, for instance, Arjuna addresses the specific question to Krishna, "What is *Karma*, O Purushottama?" And Krishna's answer is, "The offering which causes the origin of physical beings is called *Karma*" (8.3). And recall what these "offerings" were, recall how the Upanishads (and the *Gita* itself) speak of sacrifices and *yajnas* leading to procreation of beings, to rain and so on.

One can go on and on. But the little that has been said will be sufficient to hint at the fact that the way "works," "action" etc., were understood in the tradition was very different from what we are apt to understand by them today.

Tilak gets around this usage in two ways. First, he says that we need no longer obey the sacrificial ritual laid down in the *Shruti* "as it has gone out of vogue" and should instead obey, say, the ritual of duties according to the caste hierarchies laid down in the *Smriti*,[83] that instead of sacrificing animals, etc, one should sacrifice one's animal passions, that one should engage in truth, kindness, charity, that one should enlarge one's family and perpetuate one's generation, etc., for "all these actions are looked upon as a

[83] B.G. Tilak *Srimad Bhagvadgita-Rahasya*, 1975, Poona, pp. 402, 496. As we shall see in Chapter 11, Gandhi too adopts the same twofold procedure—he too stretches the meaning of the word "sacrifice" in relation to some verses and when, as in verse 9.20, the conventional meaning of sacrifice just cannot be evaded, he shrugs it aff on the plea that the reference there is merely to the "prevailing practice"; c.f. *The Gita According to Gandhi*, Mahadev Desai (ed., tr.), Navjivan, Ahmedabad, 1956, pp. 204-205.

kind of sacrifice. . . ."[84] Second, he will get around the passage by stretching the meaning of words such as "sacrifice," *yajna*, etc. Soon enough references to *yajnas* and sacrifices come to refer to all acts of the aspirant as these are all by definition sacrificed, consecrated, dedicated to the Lord. Soon enough when the Upanishads or *Gita* ask us to maintain the sacred fires, Tilak takes them to be urging action in general. Soon enough "sacrifice" comes to mean every act that is done without a desire for one's personal gain so that soon enough the only thing the *Gita* seems to be talking about is that we should be consecrating ourselves to our conventional duties, to be performing them without any expectation of personal rewards, to be performing them always for the welfare of others.[85]

Now, I am all for urging the performance of duties, for waging struggles ond the like. And if it indeed be the case that the only way to persuade us to do so is to manipulate texts such as the *Gita*, one can hardly object. But that aside (and I will return to this matter in Chapter 11) one cannot manipulate a text in this way, one cannot go around stuffing meanings into its words, one cannot go on claiming that we may no longer obey parts of it "because they have gone out of vogue" and simultaneously claim, as Tilak does, that the *Gita* is "a supernatural" work.[86] that, as he also claims, everything written in the Vedas is literally true and valid, just because it is written in the Vedas.[87] Either one must say that sacrifices and other rituals listed in the Vedas should be discarded because they are useless, because they only reflect a stage in our development when we did not understand nature, when we thought, for instance, that Gods send or withhold rain depending on whether or not they have been propitiated by sacrifices, etc., either we should abandon them on this ground or, if we insist that every word in these texts is valid, that the texts themselves are "supernatural" works, then we should urge that we continue with the sacrifices and the rituals. Where does "going out of vogue" come in? After all, if killing a goat for *Agnishoman* was effective 3000 years ago, it must be effective now too. Similarly, if the criterion is whether or not a practice is in vogue or not, how can Tilak imply that the *Gita* should be taken not to urge the performance of sacrifices but the performance of one's caste duties? Why should one obey the caste—specific duties? Why not work for getting them too "out of vogue" so that the *Gita's* sanction for them also becomes obsolete? Moreover, how is one to decide that one belief or teaching may be discarded because "it has gone out of vogue" but that another should be retained? Thus, for instance, while Tilak adopts a "modern" attitude to sacrifices he continues to believe that, as he puts it, "sometimes *the anger of deities* gives rise to intractable diseases and men have to suffer the resulting un-

[84] *Ibid.*, pp. 403-407, etc.

[85] In a sense all of Tilak's *Gita-Rahasya* is devoted to establishing these points. For ready illustrations of the speed with which the transition is affected see *Ibid.*, pp. 160, 365, 404-407, 432, 465, 479-480, 496, 512, 518, 536, 547-554, 632-634, 654.

[86] For instance, *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[87] For instance, *Ibid.*, pp. 272-273, 406.

happiness."[88] If we are to believe that the anger of gods gives rise to intractable diseases, what's wrong with also believing that this anger can be assuaged by killing a goat?

The difficulty here stems from an anxiety to force our concerns upon the ancient texts, from a reluctance to face up to the context in which those works were written, from a reluctance to acknowledge the meaning and significance that they have had for interpreters and devotees through the centuries.

A principal preoccupation of the Upanishads (and in this the *Brahma-Sutra*-s and the *Gita* faithfully reflect them) was to move people away from the superstitious veneration that they seem to have developed for rituals, sacrifices and the like, to alter the tit-for-tat, mercenary attitude they had acquired towards these rituals and sacrifices. People had come to view them as slot-machines and, worse, as the *only* slot-machines around. So that for attaining every objective they were apt to run to a ritual or a sacrifice and also they were apt to run to them only for attaining some worldly objective—a son, wealth, a kingdom, etc.

It is this attitude that the Upanishads set out to combat. They did so by asking the populace to abandon its obsession with the promised fruit; they did so by pointing to the *nirguna* unity that lay behind the *saguna* gods they were trying to please through the rituals, etc; they did so by stressing that these sacrifices, rituals, etc., were not the only means to the great secret, that in certain circumstances and for certain classes of individuals they were no more useful than "a well is when one is surrounded by a flood," that in these circumstances and for these individuals to follow these rituals, etc., would be no better than "adorning a corpse."

The authors of the Upanishads and the *Gita* were probably quite high-minded in launching this crusade. But it is my guess that the priests against whom the new doctrines may have been directed, would not have found them as inconvenient as the authors of the doctrines may have thought would be the case. After all, the Upanishadic authors, (and, of course, the Shankaras and the rest who had relied on the Upanishads to push their point of view) had not been able to go farther than asserting that the *jnanis* need not bother with the assigned duties or the prescribed rituals, etc. But those who could claim to be *jnani*-s were very few in any case. The overwhelming majority of the populace was left exactly where it was—*it* had to continue to abide by the "works" that had been laid down. And what could be better for the priests than that the people should now continue to abide by the rituals, to continue with the sacrifices and the *japas* etc., but not concern themselves with the rewards? Remember that the tit-for-tat attitude by which the people expected rewards for the rituals and the sacrifices was not just bad for the people, it was a severe embarrassment for the priests too. *They* had to continually answer for the promised rewards that hadn't turned up. Now, with all the exhortation for *nishkaama-Karma*, there was that much less

[88]*Ibid.*, p. 130.

explaining to do. One can imagine the standard dialogue: "Panditji, I say, when I asked you over to help perform that elaborate sacrifice, you said, quoting the Vedas, that I would get such and thus in return. I haven't received anything like that, you know." "But you mean, my son, that you launched upon the sacrifice hankering after its rewards? That's *precisely* the reason why the fruit is delayed. Does the *Gita* not tell us, my son, that we should perform all works without any desire for the fruit?" "Of course, Panditji. But I did not *hanker* after the rewards in *that* sense." "Well if you did not, my son, then there is no problem. You have done the good deed. The deed itself is your reward. And I can assure you, you *will* reap the reward. Does Krishna Himself in the second discourse itself not say, 'There is no loss of effort here'? If not now, then later, my son. If not in this life, then in the next, my son. But remember the cardinal rule: do as the *Shastra*-s say, never hanker after the results."

Thus the attempt of the authors of the Upanishads and the *Gita* to turn the people away from an obsession with rituals could be easily contained; it could indeed be turned to advantage. In any case, it failed. The objective circumstances thwarted such good intentions as the authors may have had. The later Upanishads themselves—as we noticed in our discussion of the sectarian Upanishads in Chapter 4—succumbed to ritual in a big way.

Even as a principal concern of the authors of the Upanishads, *Brahma-Sutras* and the *Gita* was to dilute people's obsession with rituals, sacrifices, etc., so important were these in the popular consciousness, so active and heated were the debates regarding them, that our authors and commentators, the Shankaras and the Ramanujas, could not help addressing themselves to the issues about *these* "works" that were agitating the people and their priests.

And what were these issues? Here is a sampling of the issues and the answers.

Which rituals and which sacrifices are effective for securing which ends? (Answer: the authorities disagree.) Are the gods propitiated by them? (Answer: yes; after all, in the *Gita*, 9.24, even Krishna refers to Himself as "the enjoyer and Lord of sacrifices.") Are the gods like Indra actually present at the sacrifices? (Answer: yes; after all, does the *Taittiriya Samhita* [1.6. 7.1] not speak of gods "going to" some sacrifices and not to others?) But then how can an Indra be present simultaneously at a number of sacrifices that may be going on at the same moment? (Answer: simple; because, as the *Brahma-Sutra*-s [1.3.27] explain, the Vedas tell us that Gods can assume many bodies simultaneously; after all, does not the *Brihad-Aranyaka*, 3.9.1-9, not speak of the one *Hiranyagarbha* multiplying Himself into three thousand and three gods?) Does killing a goat for *Agnishoman* during the sacrifice not entail evil? (No, say the *Brahma-Sutra*-s, 3.1.26, as the sacrifice of which the killing is a part is enjoined by the Vedas. No, echoes Shankara, "knowledge of virtue and vice is derived from the scriptures. The scriptures alone are the source for knowing that such an act is virtuous, and such another is not virtuous. . . ." and as the scriptures enjoin the

are necessarily virtuous. But, says the adversary, by saying, "one should not injure any of the creatures," does the scripture not itself show that injury done to any creature is unholy? "True," replies Shankara, "but that is only a general rule, and here is the exception, '*One should immolate* an animal for *Agni* and *Soma*.' Both the general rule and the exception have *their* well-defined scope. Hence the Vedic rites are quite pure, since they are practised by the good people and not condemned by them. . . ."[89] Moreover, adds Ramanuja, "scripture declares that the killing of sacrificial animals makes them go up to the heavenly world, and therefore is not of the nature of harm. This is declared in the text, 'The *animal killed at the sacrifice* having assumed a divine body goes to the heavenly world'; 'with a golden body it ascends to the heavenly world.' An action that is the means of supreme exaltation is not of the nature of harm, even if it involves some little pain; it rather is of beneficial nature. With this the *Mantra* also agrees: 'Thou dost not die, thou goest to the gods on easy paths; where virtuous men go, not evil-doers, there the divine *Savitri* may lead thee.' An act which has healing tendency, although it may cause a transitory pain, men of insight declare to be preservative and beneficial. . . ."[90]) Who is it that ordains the rewards of these "works," the works themselves, the gods or Brahman Himself? (Answer: some say one, report the *Brahma-Sutra*-s, 3.2.38-41, and some the other).[91]

These were the sorts of questions that were agitating the public mind about "works." To realize how heated the debate on them was one has only to see what an enormous amount of energy the *Sannyasa* and other Upanishads, the *Gita* itself, and leading commentators like Shankara and Ramanuja in their commentaries on the Upanishads, the *Gita* and the *Brahma-Sutras*, how much energy and space they all expend on just one question—whether or not the *sannyasi*-s and the *jnanins* have to perform these "works." There is scarcely another question that concerns Shankara more in his *Gita-Bhashya* than this one.

It was quite natural, therefore, for the authors of the Upanishads and the *Gita* as well as for later commentators to devote time and space to resolving the controversies that had grown up around these sacrifices and rituals and it was just as natural for them *to* have *these rituals and sacrifices in their* mind when they talked of "works" and "action."

[89] *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya*, Gambhirananda (tr), Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1972, pp. 585-586.

[90] *The Vedanta-Sutras, With the Commentary by Ramanuja*, G. Thibaut (tr), *Sacred Books of the East*, Max Mueller (ed), Vol. XLVIII, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1971 (reprint), p. 599. Treating those who are about to be killed in the righteous war, on the analogy of animals one kills in a sacrifice, Ramanuja has Krishṇa instructing Arjuna that no sin will attach to his killing them for, in a real sense, he is only helping them obtain better incarnations; c.f., *The Gita-Bhashya of Ramanuja*, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42.

[91] On these and similar questions see *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya*, *op. cit.*, pp. 206-207, 585-586, 640-643, and *The Vedanta-Sutras, With the Commentary by Ramanuja*, *op. cit.*, pp. 155, 330-331, 598-599, 626-628.

Indeed, so great was the emphasis on them that if the regimen prescribed in the Upanishads is strictly adhered to there just would not be *any time* for deeds of the kind that Tilak and others want us to believe the tradition urges. Again and again we are told to spend all our time in meditation, in the different *mantra-japs*, *asanas* and so on.

> Time may, *without a break*, be spent in these six concentrations well . . . .[92]

> The wise man should carry out his investigation (about the right path to be pursued for attaining liberation), *without wasting even a single minute of his life-time*, in due conformity with the *Shastra*-s, at the proper place, perfectly at ease, and in a manner that would secure for him the company of righteous men, till he reposes in the Atman . . . .[93]

> Whichever saintly *Yogin* continues to meditate thus, *till he attains his sleep, till he attains his death*, should be known as *Jivanmukta*; he is blessed and has discharged his duty . . . .[94]

> *Laya-yoga* is the dissolution of the mind described in myriads of ways. *While walking, standing, sleeping and eating*, the practitioner should meditate on the digitless *Ishvara* . . . .[95]

> 'The one Brahman should be meditated upon *from the time of awakening from sleep till one gets sleep*'—says the *Shruti* . . . .[96]

> Thinking of me, singing my glories, mutually conversing about me, *having become solely absorbed in me*, O sage of great intellect, *spend thy time* . . . .[97]

> Hence, *from the time of one's rising from sleep to the time when he goes back to sleep*, let him reflect on the oneness of the Brahman . . . .[98]

Where is the scope, where indeed is the time for waging struggles, for conventional deeds, in all this?

THE GITA

"But does the *Gita* not controvert everything you have said? You say the world is dismissed as unreal; but the *Gita* asks Arjuna to fight a war. Is that not as this-worldy an activity as one would want? You say the world, when its

[92] *Sarasvatirahasyopanishad*, 65.
[93] *Yogakundalyupanishad*, III 33-35.
[94] *Yogashikhopanishad*, II. 17.
[95] *Ibid.*, 2.64-65.
[96] *Mahopanishad*, IV. 39-43.
[97] *Yogatattvopanishad*, 23, 24.
[98] *Varahopanishad*, 2.45-48.

existence is recognized, is said to be subject to such inexorable laws that there is little scope for volitional acts; but in the *Gita* Krishna asks Arjuna to prosecute a war and thus himself help change a course of events. You say works are regarded as yielding rewards that are both inferior as well as transient; but in the *Gita*—in verses 5.2-5, to be precise—Krishna explicitly says that *both* the *Karma-yogin*-s and the *Sankhya*-s attain the Supreme Goal. You say that progressive attenuation of all activity, including ideation, is what is urged; but in the *Gita* Krishna explicitly shows how one can continue to participate in activities, to the extent of fighting a bloody war, and yet achieve the highest goal. You say that 'works' and 'action' often mean no more than sacrifices and rituals; while it is true, as you point out, that occasionally the *Gita* itself uses the words in this sense, surely you cannot disregard the fact that the central action that the *Gita* is talking about is no mere ritual, it is war, an enormous, bloody war. How can you talk that away?"

There is much in all this. The *Gita* does mark a substantial step forward in bringing the Upanishads down to earth. It represents what has been so aptly called "the tug of real life" at the Upanishads. After all, even the *Advaitins* never lived up to the pure doctrine they said the Upanishads preached; if the world was indeed unreal, if their bodies were unreal why were they continuing to eat and drink, to feed what isn't there; if all was indeed an undifferentiated pure consciousness why did they, who were not, continue to teach a doctrine, that wasn't either, to pupils, who too were not?[99] Thus, while the Upanishads preached an extremely rarified world-view, in actual practice people continued to eat and drink, to fight and love. The vast chasm between the doctrine and life stared everyone in the face; it had to be bridged. And the *Gita* represents an effort to bridge the chasm.

Its context—a righteous war—constitutes the strongest argument for regarding it as urging conventional deeds. And its central message—of *anashakti yoga*, as Gandhi characterized it, of acting without attachment or aversion to the objects of action; the *Kauravas* one must slay, and without any attachment to the prospective fruit of the action—represents, as has often been remarked, one of the great intellectual breakthroughs, a great bridge between the actionlessness urged by the Upanishads and the real life that compelled one, willy-nilly, to act. It also remains one of the best bits of common-sense, one of the best bits of counsel to the man engaged in action.

Its Ambivalence

But for all this, the *Gita* is an ambivalent, almost an equivocal work. This ambivalence is testified to by the ease with which so many commentators—Shankara on one side and Tilak on the other, Gandhi on one side and should one say, Godse on the other—have been able to use it as the scaffold-

[99]This oft-hurled taunt has never been successfully answered by the *Advaitins*; see *The Vedanta-Sutras With Commentary by Ramanuja*, *op. cit.*, for instance, pp. 448-459, to glimpse the effective use Ramanuja makes of it.

ing for such divergent points of view. If He had an unequivocal message Krishna should have spoken a little less obscurely.

The similarity of the *Gita* to the basic Upanishadic doctrine as well as its characteristic ambiguity can be seen by recalling its view about the goal itself and about the knowledge that will lead us to the goal. In the *Gita*, as in the Upanishads and, of course, in the *Brahma-Sutra*-s, the highest goal is the same—freedom from the cycle of birth and death, the submergence in Brahman. And in the *Gita*, as in the other works we are considering, internalizing the same knowledge of one's non-difference from the Brahman remains the way to merging with Him. It is to spell out this "sublime knowledge, the best of all knowledges," as Krishna puts it in verse 14.1, "which having learnt, all the sages have passed to high perfection from here," the knowledge, as He says in the next verse, having obtained which the sages "have attained unity with Me," it is to set out this knowledge that the *Gita* is expounded. And those who acquire it, says Krishna in verse 14.2, are neither born at the time of creation nor disturbed when the cosmos is destroyed at the end of a *Kalpa*. In verse 15.10 He says, "*they* see who possess the eye of knowledge." In verses 4.24-33 after enumerating various kinds of sacrifices, Krishna affirms that the best of all sacrifices is the Knowledge-sacrifice. "Even should'st thou be the most sinful of the sinful," He tells Arjuna in verses 4.36-8, "thou shalt verily cross all sin by the bark of wisdom. As kindled fire reduces fuel to ashes, O Arjuna, so does wisdom-fire reduce all actions to ashes. Verily, there exists here no purifier equal to wisdom . . . ." It is this knowledge which gives meaning to acts such as sacrifices (for, as He says in verse 9.24, "I am indeed the Enjoyer, as also the Lord, of all sacrifices"), it is this perception alone which makes all conventional acts meaningful. And the knowledge is of non-separateness from the Absolute, this knowledge, as He puts it in verses 9.16-19, that "I am the *Kratu*, I am the *yajna*, I am the *svadha*, I am the *aushadha*, I am the *Mantra*, I myself am the butter, I am the fire, I the act of offering. I am the father of this world, the mother . . . I am the Goal, the Sustainer, the Lord, the Witness, the Abode . . . ." It is by learning—in the sense of internalizing and living—these notions that one reaches what Krishna calls in 18.50 "the supreme consummation of knowledge"—that is, Brahman Himself.

Thus, the supreme goal in the *Gita* remains the same as in the Upanishads. But what is the knowledge that will lead to the suffusing perception of one's identity with the Brahman? When the *Gita* (in discourse 9) sets out to expound "the sovereign wisdom, the sovereign science, the sovereign secret, the supreme purifier," it is a fairly straightforward and direct account of the same non-duality we have encountered all along. In verse 10.32 it has Krishna say clearly that "of all knowledges I am the Knowledge of the Self," raising this particular knowledge to be the way to submerging in Brahman. Similarly, in verses 5.16, 17, Krishna says that it is the knowledge of the Self that destroys unwisdom like the sun banishes darkness. In verses 13.12-18 also, while spelling out that "knowing which one attains the Immortal . . . on knowing which one is fitted for My state," Krishna again repeats many of the

statements about the Brahman that we have already encountered when reviewing the Upanishads—how He is beginningless, how He is neither *Sat* nor *Asat*, how though bodiless He has hands, feet, eyes, ears, mouths, everywhere, how though devoid of senses He has the use of all the senses, how though unmoving He moves and so on. In verses 13.27, 30 etc., too, we are told that the knower is he who sees Him in all beings and all creation in Him. In discourse 9 (e.g., verses 9.20-34) we are told again and again that to be efficacious, worship, sacrifices, etc., must be suffused with this knowledge of the non-dual Brahman.

But at other points Krishna is more specific and, many insist, His emphasis, indeed the content of His instruction, is different. In verses 13.2, 34 we are told that *the* liberating knowledge is the knowledge of the body and the Atman and of the difference between the two. In 13.19 *the* knowledge turns out to be the perception of eternal duality—the conviction that *Purusha* and *Prakriti* are different and that both are without beginning, that *Prakriti* is what gives birth to forms and qualities; by verses 13.29 and 14.19 we are being told that he alone sees who sees that *Prakriti* is the sole agent of all that happens. By discourse 15, (for instance, verses 1-4, 16-20) this *duality* has become a *triad*—"the perishable, the imperishable and Me." Going back to discourse 10 (verse 7) the knower is not spoken of as the one who realizes or perceives any of the above, but the conventional devotee "who knows this power and glory of Mine."

Now, there is a sense in which all these varying bits can be taken to be the building blocks or, if you prefer, mere aspects of the one supreme knowledge about the non-dual Brahman with which we started. But there is also a sense—and to this the varying accounts of hundreds of commentators bear testimony—in which *each of these aspects, some would say approximations*, can be taken to be what they are said to be at different points in the *Gita*—that is, as *the* one knowledge which (and which by itself) will ferry us to Brahman.

The position regarding working and acting is equally equivocal. We can readily see this by following the twists and turns for a while.

At numerous points Krishna exhorts Arjuna to fight, to leave all to Him and plunge into the battle. "Do fight, therefore, O descendant of Bharata," He says in verse 2.18; "Wherefore, O son of Kunti, arise, resolved to fight," He repeats in verse 2.37, "prepare for battle;" He tells Arjuna in verse 2 38, "Renouncing all action in Me . . ., do thou fight;" He says in verse 3.30, "at all times do thou meditate on Me and fight;" He says in verse 8.7, "Therefore arise and obtain fame, conquer the enemies, enjoy unrivalled dominion. . ."; He exhorts Arjuna in verses 11.33, 34, "These, killed by Me, do thou kill; fear not, fight, thou shalt conquer the enemies." What exhortations to action could be clearer than these? Similarly, in verse 3.8, Krishna tells Arjuna, "do thy bounden duty"; in verse 18.46 He tells him to worship Him by performing his assigned duty; by verse 18.56 He is asking Arjuna to be "continuously doing *all* actions whatsoever."

All this is true. But there are other exhortations too. In verse 10.9, as

every *Bhakti-yogi* will remind us, Krishna asks us to be "ever-speaking of Me," in verse 8.14 to be constantly and for long thinking of Him. In verses 5.27, 28, as every meditation-advocate will remind us, Krishna assures Arjuna, "shutting out all external contacts and fixing the sight between the eye-brows, equalizing the out-going and the in-coming breaths which pass through the nostrils, controlling the senses, mind and intellect, having *moksha* as his highest goal, free from desire, fear and anger—the sage who ever (remains thus) is verily liberated."

We are often reminded that we need His grace for our salvation (for instance, in verses 11.48, 53-4, 18.56-8, 62) and, to attain the we are exhorted, not to fight but, for instance in verses 9.33, 34, to "worship Me, Fix thy mind on Me, be devoted to Me, sacrifice to Me, bow to Me." In verses 9.11-14 the contrast between fools and others is not said to consist in that one set is indolent and the other is dedicated to deeds but in that the former are lost in "vain hopes, vain actions, vain knowledge, devoid of discrimination," while the others "worship Me with mind turned to no other . . . . Always talking of Me, strenuous, firm in vows, and reverent, they worship Me with love, always devout." The exhortation here is to devout *bhakti*. So potent is worship that "if one of even very evil life," says Krishna a little later (in verses 9.30, 31), "worships Me, resorting to no one else, he must indeed be deemed righteous, for he is rightly resolved. For, finding refuge in Me, they also who, O son of Pritha, may be of a sinful birth—women"—our new-fangled social reformers to note—"*vaishyas* as well as *shudras*—even they attain the Supreme Goal." In verse 8.22 Krishna tells us, "the Highest *Purusha* . . . is attainable by exclusive devotion." The same exclusive devotion and worship, the same "faith without cavilling" is what is urged again and again (for instance, in verses 10.8-11; 9.22, 23, 26, 29; 12.6-8; 13.25; 14.26, etc.) In verse 6.47 He tells us, "of all *yogin*-s, whoso, full of faith, worships Me *he* is deemed by Me as most devout." When Krishna reaches the climax of enumerating the traits of the aspirant who will attain the Supreme Goal, it is again devotion that He lists: "Becoming Brahman, of serene self, he neither grieves nor desires, treating all beings alike, he attains supreme devotion to Me. By devotion he knows Me in truth, what and who I am; then, knowing Me in truth, he forthwith enters into Me" (verses 18.54, 55) And Krishna's final exhortation (in verses 18.64-66) too is for faith, devotion, worship, doing homage to Him: "Hear thou again My word supreme," He says, "the most secret of all. Fix thy thought on Me, be devoted to Me, worship Me, do homage to Me. . . . Abandoning all righteous deeds, seek Me as thy sole refuge. . . ."

Are the exhortations here for fighting wars or for chanting hymns?

Or consider the matter from another point of veiw. As is well known, the *Gita* enumerates a number of reasons on account of which one should act. First of all (in verses 3.5, 8, 23, 24; 18.11) it says that one must act because action is unavoidable, if for nothing else then just for maintaining one's body and for the maintenance of the world. Secondly, (in verses 2.31-33, 18.43 etc.) it urges action on the ground that it follows directly from the caste duties that have been laid down by the law-givers. Third, (in verses 3.20, 4.15, for

instance) it urges action by citing the example of great men like Janaka, etc., who, though knowers and *jnani*-s, acted. Krishna points to His own example too (for instance, in verses 3.22; 4.7, 8). He reminds Arjuna that although He has nothing to achieve, no goal to reach, He acts, although He has no desires, He teaches Arjuna for the latter's well-being. (Why do Janaka etc., act; why does He act? Apart from the fact that in His view the worlds would perish were He to desist from action, two reasons are given: the populace, He says [e.g., in verses 3.21, 23, 26], follows great men and, therefore, they should act, to set an example;[100] moreover, great beings, including Him, act and are born from time to time, He says [in verses 3.25; 4.7, 8, for instance] to protect the good, to root out evil, to re-establish the true religion.) The fourth reason for engaging in *Karma* is that (as stated in verses 5.6, 11; 6.3; 18.5, etc.) it is a means to knowledge, that action "helps purify the Self" (that the Self is never tainted and, therefore, never really in need of being "purified" is not to be recalled for the moment). Finally, deeds are recommended (*e.g.* in verses 3.19; 5.6; 12.8-11) on the ground that for most of us performing them and thereby hoping to improve our access to the supreme knowledge (in this or, as most passages would imply, in subsequent incarnations) is easier than a direct attack on the knowledge-front itself.

But then, just as there are these reasons, there are many passages in which the mention of deeds would have been most natural and yet they are not mentioned at all—by oversight, say the *karma-yoga* interpreters; by design, say the others.

In verses 7.16-19, Krishna exalts true knowledge above all. In listing the four kinds of people He regards as worshipping Him, He does not even include the *Karma-yogin*-s. "Four kinds of virtuous men," He says, "worship Me, O Arjuna—the distressed, the seeker of knowledge, the seeker of wealth, and the wise man, O Lord of the Bharatas. Of them the wise man, ever steadfast and devoted to the One, excels; for exceedingly dear am I to the wise, and the wise to Me. Noble indeed are all these," He continues, "but the wise man, I deem, is the very Self . . . ."

In verse 2.49 He clearly states, "Verily action is far inferior to devotion in wisdom, O Dhananjaya. In wisdom seek thou shelter . . . ."

But then what about the beginning of the fifth discourse? Does Arjuna not ask Him point-blank: "Renunciation of actions, O Krishna, Thou praisest and again *yoga*. Tell me conclusively that which is better of the two?" And

[100]Shankara is nearer the mark: he says that the knowers need not act *precisely because* the populace does *not* follow them! C.f. *Sri Shankaracharya, The Bhagvad Gita*, Alladi Mahadeva Shastri (tr), 1897, Samata Books, Madras, 1977 reprint, p. 328. He points out that their "attachment and other evil passions" necessarily lead ordinary mortals to act in ways counter to the example of the scients. After all, in spite of the good example of the latter, "we do see people engaging in the practice of Black Magic," he says. Does Krishna not Himself say in verse 3.33, Shankara could have added, "even a wise man acts according to his nature, all creatures follow their nature. What then will compulsion avail?" Well, if compulsion will avail nothing, what will mere example avail?

doesn't Krishna answer, "Renunciation and *yoga* through action *both* lead to the highest bliss; but, of the two, *yoga through action is esteemed more than renunciation of action*"? Does that not conclusively show that Krishna urges action rather than withdrawal and renunciation?"

Not all that conclusively, says Shankara. Look at the context. Krishna has been explaining two paths to Arjuna, how they differ, how they re-inforce each other. It is clear that Arjuna is not up to the *jnana-marga* as yet. Arjuna has now asked a specific question; he has asked his Guide to address Himself to *his specific* predicament. Leave the generalizations aside, he says, tell me what *I* should be doing. And Krishna, now addressing Himself specifically to Arjuna's predicament, looking specifically to *his* underdeveloped endowments, gives the advice that He thinks is best suited to Arjuna. This is what He is doing. He is not laying down the general rule. That He has already done in verse 2.49 where He has plainly said, "action is far inferior to devotion in wisdom . . . .[101]

"But then what about verse 3.8? Does Krishna not explicitly tell Arjuna, 'Do thou perform thy bounden duty, *for action is superior to inaction*, . . .? Well, does He not?"

Nothing to it, says Shankara. What Krishna is actually saying is, "Action *without any desire for the fruit* is superior to abstention from action and *yet inwardly hankering after the fruit of action*." The stanza must be taken as continuing and amplifying the point that Krishna has raised just a few verses earlier, in verse 3.4 to be precise. Don't you recall what He says in verse 3.4? "Not by *mere* abstention from action does man attain actionlessness, nor by *mere* renunciation does he attain perfection." That is, as He will again point out later, it is no use just sitting back attenuating your actions if your mind is feverishly running after the fruit that the action will, you think, yield you. The "*mere* renunciation" is what He is holding as inferior to action and that too to action from which the desire for fruit has been banished. Listen to what He says in verses 3.6 and 7, the two verses preceding the one you have quoted: "He who, restraining the organs of action, sits thinking in his mind of the objects of the senses, self-deluded, he is said to be one of false conduct. But whoso, restraining the senses by the mind, O Arjuna, engages in *Karma-Yoga*, unattached with organs of action, he is esteemed." See? Krishna is not laying down any general rule regarding the relative merits of *Karma-* and *Jnana-yoga*-s. All He is comparing is *false* abstention from action with action-combined-with-fruit-renunciation. And obviously the latter is preferable to the hypocrisy of the former. But you can't wrest more out of the passages than that. This is how a Shankara would argue.[102]

Similarly in the fourteenth discourse when various things, states, activi-

[101]This is the gravamen of Shankara's case on this matter, c.f. Srī Shankaracharya, *The Bhagvad Gita op. cit.*, for instance, pp. 89-91. I shall return to this question in a moment.

[102]*Ibid.*, for instance, pp. 97, 162-163.

ties are being classified into *Sattvik*, *Rajasik* and *Tamasik*, where is knowledge classified and where are deeds classified? All the *guna*-s bind, we are told. But the bond from attachment to knowledge and happiness is declared (in verse 14.6) to be *Sattvic* and that from attachment to action (in verse 14.7) to be *Rajasic*. (The refrain is repeated in verse 14.9)

In the thirteenth discourse (verses 13.7-11) when Krishna sets out to enumerate the traits needed for acquiring the great knowledge, He does not mention deeds at all: "humility, modesty, innocence, patience, uprightness, service of the teacher, purity, steadfastness, self-control; absence of attachment for objects of the senses, and also absence of egoism; perception of evil in birth, death and old age, in sickness and pain; unattachment, absence of affection for son, wife, home and the like, and constant equanimity on the attainment of the desirable and the undesirable; unflinching devotion to Me in the *yoga* of non-separation, resort to solitary places, distate for the society of men; constancy in knowledge of the Self, perception of the end of the knowledge of truth . . . ." Quite an extensive list, isn't it? And yet while knowledge of the Self figures in it, unflinching devotion figures in it, a hint or two about *sannyasa* figures in it, deeds do not.

In the fourteenth discourse Arjuna specifically asks Krishna (in verse 14.21), "By what marks, O Lord, is he known who has crossed beyond the three *guna*-s? What is his conduct, and how does he pass beyond the three *guna*-s?"

Consider the traits that Krishna enumerates in the subsequent five verses: "He does not hate, O Pandava, light and activity and delusion if they are present, nor does he long for them if they are absent. He who, seated as a neutral, is not moved by *gunas*: who, knowing that the *guna*-s act, is firm and moves not; he to whom pain and pleasure are alike, who dwells in the self, to whom a clod of earth and stone and gold are alike, to whom the dear and the non-dear are alike, who is a man of wisdom, to whom censure and praise are the same; who is the same in honour and disgrace, the same towards friends and enemies, *abandoning all undertakings*—he is said to have crossed beyond all *guna*-s. And he who serves Me with the unfailing devotion of love, he, crossing beyond the three *guna*-s, is fitted for becoming Brahman." Now, many of the traits—the equanimity, the impartiality, the imperturbability—can well characterize an ideal man of action. But so can they be said to characterize the ideal recluse; and specially so because of the specific statement in verse 14.25 that the man has abandoned *all undertakings*.

The allusions to *sannyasi*-s, to ascetics, to men who have completely withdrawn from the affairs of the world are even more specific in many other verses. The sixth discourse is devoted to elaborating the virtues and some of the techniques, not of fighting, but of the *yoga* of meditation and passages such as the following occur, (this one being verse 6.10): "Let the *yogin* try constantly to keep the mind steady, *remaining in seclusion, alone*, with the mind and body controlled, free from desire and having no possessions . . . ." Now, surely these are the traits that are most often taken to

describe a *sannyasi* and not a warrior. Or consider verses 12.16-18: "He who is free from wants, who is pure, clever, unconcerned, untroubled, *renouncing all undertakings*, he who is (thus) devoted to Me is dear to Me . . . . He who is the same to friend and foe . . . to whom censure and praise are equal, who is *silent, content with anything, homeless*, steady-minded, full of devotion, that man is dear to Me . . . ." These too come close to the conventional descriptions of a *sannyasi*.

Or take verses 18.51-55 as one more example before moving on. Here too Krishna is describing the path to the supreme perfection. He says, "Imbued with a pure reason, controlling the self with firmness, abandoning sound and other objects, and laying aside love and hatred; *resorting to a sequestered spot, eating but little*, speech and body and mind subdued, *always engaged in concentration and meditation*, imbued with dispassion; having abandoned egotism, *strength*, arrogance, desire, enmity, *property*, free from the notion of 'mine' and peaceful, he is fit for becoming Brahman. Becoming Brahman, of serene self, he neither grieves nor desires; treating all beings alike, he attains supreme devotion to Me. By devotion he knows Me in truth, what and who I am; then, knowing Me in truth, he forthwith enters into Me." Do the verses describe a man in the heat of battle? Rather the sequence they seem to be spelling out is the contrary course: a man takes to *sannyasa*; by progressive attenuation of all emotions, contacts etc., he develops exclusive devotion to the Lord; this devotion leads him to knowledge; and the knowledge dawns into a complete submergence in Brahman.

Next, consider a few of the numerous occasions on which the *Gita*, like the Upanishads, affirms that the *jnanin* does not have any duties to perform, that he need not busy himself in deeds of any kind.

Shankara opens his case with verse 2.21 itself: "Whoso knows Him as indestructible, eternal, unborn and inexhaustible—How, O son of Pritha, and whom does such a man cause to slay, and when does he slay?" The *jnanin* becomes the Self; the Self is immutable; all action entails mutability, change, it entails mental activity but the *jnanin* is now immutable, he is changeless, completely still; hence, concludes Shankara, as "the reason (*i.e.*, the immutability of the Self) for the denial of slaying applies to all actions alike, what the Lord means to teach in this section appears to be the denial of all action whatsoever in the case of the enlightened; the denial . . . of the specific act of slaying being only meant as an example . . . ."[103]

Moreover, and here, of course, scores and scores of verses can be cited that the *jnanin* transcends all opposites, they vanish for Him. Consequently, the distinction between what is enjoined and what is prohibited too vanishes and he is not required to do anything at all. "He who is imbued with wisdom," explains Krishna in verse 2.50, a typical verse in this matter, "*casts off here both good deeds and bad deeds* . . . ." "That man, verily, who

[103]Sri Shankaracharya, *The Bhagvad Gita*, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-49.

rejoices only in the Self," Krishna reiterates in verses 3.17, 18, "who is satisfied with the Self, who is content in the Self alone—*for him there is nothing to do.* For him, *there is here no interest whatever in what is done and what is not done* . . . ." (And this in the discourse on *Karma-yoga*, that is, the third discourse.) Verse 4.21 again reminds us that the *jnanin* is engaged in the minimum of actions, only those that are required for the mere maintenance of the body: "free from desire, with the mind and the self controlled, having relinquished all possessions, *doing merely bodily action*, he incurs no sin . . . ." In verse 19.20 again Krishna clearly states that when a man becomes a knower "all his duties are accomplished." Does verse 6.3 not state the *Gita's* position succinctly when it says, "for a devotee who wishes to attain *yoga*, action is said to be the means; for the same (devotee), when he has attained *yoga*, quiescence is said to be the means"?

"But surely you are over-stating the case. Even if one concedes that according to the *Gita*, *jnanin*-s need not act, the fact is that there are very few *jnanin*-s around. Does Krishna not Himself say in verse 7.3, 'Among thousands of men, one per chance strives for perfection; even among those who strive and are perfect, only one perchance knows Me in truth'? As *jnanin*-s are rare, we must assume that the message of the *Gita* for the overwhelming majority is still—'act,' 'do your duty,' 'arise and fight'."

But the state of actionlessness does not, even according to the *Gita*, descend suddenly, in a flash, as it were. Activities are to be gradually curtailed. At some points the *Gita* almost literally echoes the Upanishads on this matter: "Do thou, O Pandava," says Krishna in verse 6.2, "know *yoga* to be that which they call renunciation; no one, verily, becomes a *yogin who has not renounced thoughts*," that is, who has not attenuated ideation itself; as all action is preceded by mental activity this too, Shankara would argue, becomes an injunction against acts of all kinds.[104] And, as Krishna explains in verses 6.4, 25, "when a man, *renouncing all thoughts*, is not attached to sense-objects and actions, then he is said to have attained *yoga* . . . . *Little by little let him withdraw*, by *buddhi* held firm, keeping the mind established in the Self, *let him not think of anything* . . . ."

"But surely the crucial teaching is not to abandon action; what has to be abandoned is attachment (fondness or hatred) to the objects of action (the Kauravas who have to be slain) and the hankering for the likely fruit of action. Is that not the case?"

Most passages in the *Gita* suggest that this is indeed the case. When Krishna describes a sage in verse 4.19, He does not say, "a sage is one who has abandoned all action." He describes him as one "whose engagements are all devoid of desires and purposes and whose actions have been burnt (i.e. purified) by the fire of wisdom . . . ." In verse 6.4 He speaks of the *yoga-siddha* not as one who has *renounced* action, but as one who is *not attached* to it. Similarly, in verses 18.2-7 "*sannyasa*" is defined as giving up, not action itself, but all attachment to the objects of action and so also

[104] *Ibid.*, pp. 47, 186.

"*tyaga*" is defined, not as fleeing from action, but as giving up the hankering after the fruit of action. Again and again (for instance, in verses 2.51, 58, 62-4; 3.30; 4.22, 41; 5.7, 10, 12; 6.1; 9.9; 12.6; 18.17, 23-25) Krishna shows that it *is* possible to act without having the *karma* bind one, that it *is* possible to make use of one's senses without getting ensnared by them, that it *is* possible to handle sense-objects without sinking into their quicksand.

Yes, that is so. But then what about the assertions (for instance, in verse 5.3) that we must renounce *all* actions; what about the assertions (for instance, in verses 12.16-18; 14.25) that we must abandon *all* undertakings; what about verse 18.49 where Krishna talks of the "freedom from action" as the "supreme state"; what about verse 18.66 when Krishna asks us to "abandon all righteous deeds and seek refuge in Me"? And, in any case, is the fact that Krishna, Janaka and a few others could continue to act and yet not be tainted all that relevant to mere mortals like us? May not the reason for Krishna being able to act without being tainted consist in His supernatural powers? After all, He had all sorts of dalliances with the *gopi*-s and yet, as the *Gopala-Tapinyupanishad* (*Gopalottara-Tapini*, 2-15)[105] tells us, He was a celibate because, being completely detached, He was merely the witness, the non-enjoyer. Does this mean that you and I too should follow the example of His amorous activities? "No," you say, "because He had such powers of total detachment that He could do what He wanted with all those *gopi*-s and yet remain celibate while you and I, were we to follow Him, would end up as dissipated lechers." Precisely. Just as we do not have that enormous power of absolute detachment to keep us celibate while fornicating, we do not have the power to act and yet remain untainted.

And so on and on. The debate can go on endlessly as it has indeed gone on for centuries.

I think that two points have to be acknowledged: first, some passages are indeed ambiguous and, second, when taken at face value some passages, some rankings, are contradictory. There is enough ground for each disputant, therefore, to appropriate the *Gita* for his own purposes.

It would take long to document the matter in full. A few examples can be inferred from what has been said earlier in this chapter. We can now do no more than list an example or two and move on.

Consider a verse like 4.18. It says, "He who can see inaction in action, who can also see action in inaction, he is wise among men, he is devout, he is the performer of all action." Now, we can see easily how a verse such as this may be taken by each of the disputants to be affirming his particular position. To someone who wants to use the *Gita* for urging action the verse says, in effect, "the *Karma-yogin* who is detached from the objects of his deeds as well as from the fruit, who, as the verse says, sees inaction in action, is not acting—in the sense that, even though he fights, does his bounden duty, etc., the acts will not bind him." The *sannyasa*-advocate can interpret the verse to mean quite the opposite. To

[105] The relevant passage is quoted later in the chapter.

him it implies that the *sannyasi* who has realized that what is conventionally regarded as "action" is no action at all, that what is conventionally regarded as "inaction"—the total immersion in, the total withdrawal into the Self—is action of the highest order, that he, indeed, "is the performer of all action." Indeed, a third interpretation too is possible; some, as Shankara notes, have taken the verse to be referring to the question of whether one should or should not perform the ordained duties and have taken the verse to mean, "he who regards the obligatory duties as inaction, since they do not produce any effect—just as a cow may be said to be no cow when she does not serve the purpose of yielding milk—and he who regards the neglect of obligatory duties as action, since it produces evil such as hell, he is wise among men, etc. . . ."[106]

Just as passages like this one can be taken to mean any of several things, some of the stanzas and rankings implicit in them when taken literally and by themselves are contradictory. We have come across a few of them already.

Thus, in verse 2.49 we are told, "verily, action is far inferior to devotion in wisdom. . . in wisdom seek thou shelter. . .," but in verse 5.2, that "renunciation and *yoga* through action both lead to the highest bliss; but, of the two, *yoga* through action is esteemed more than renunciation of action. . .," and again in verse 6.1, "he who, without depending on the fruits of action, performs his bounden duty, he is a *sannyasin* and a *yogin*, not he who is without (the sacred) fire and without action." On the third hand, as it were, in the sixth discourse which is on *dhyana-yoga*, it is the *dhyana-yogin* who is referred to in verse 6.46 and extolled above all others: "a *yogin* (the subject of the discourse being *dhyana-yoga* the reference is to a *dhyana-yogin*) is deemed superior to men of austerity and superior even to men of knowledge; he is also superior to men of action. . . ." But, on the fourth hand, by relying on the very next verse (verse 6.47) the devotionalists can claim that it is *bhakti* that the *Gita* extols most for in it Krishna says that He deems him as the most devout "whoso full of faith, worships Me with his inner self abiding in Me." In verses 7.16-19, as we have seen, Krishna says that it is the man of knowledge who "excels, for exceedingly dear am I to the wise and he is dear to Me; noble indeed are all these but the wise man, I deem, is the very Self. . . ." In verse 9.29, on the other hand, He states a preference for the *bhakta*, "The same I am to all beings; to Me there is none hateful or dear; but whoso worship Me with devotion, they are in Me, and I am also in them." And in verse 12.2 He declares the worshippers as the "*best yogin-s*": "Those who, fixing their thought on Me, contemplate Me, always devout, embued with supreme faith, those in My opinion are the best *yogin*-s."

Similarly, in verse 2.39 and 3.3 Krishna states that He is teaching *two*

[106]C.f. Sri Shankaracharya, *The Bhagvad Gita, op. cit.*, pp. 128-134. Compare this with *The Gita-Bhashya of Ramanuja, op. cit.*, p. 126, where the first interpretation is urged; see also B.G. Tilak, *Srimad Bhagvad Gita Rahasya, op. cit.*, pp. 949-51 where he tries to clarify what he calls "a considerable amount of confusion" about "*karma*," "*akarma*" and "*vikarma*" by urging his own point of view.

separate paths, ("This which has been taught to thee is wisdom concernin Sankhya. Now listen to wisdom concerning *yoga*. . ."; "In this world *twofold* path was taught by Me at first, O sinless one: that of *Sankhya* s b devotion to knowledge and that of *yogin*-s by devotion to action") but i verses 5.4, 5 He says, "children, not the wise, speak of *Sankhya* and *yoga* a distinct. . . . He sees who sees *Sankhya* and *yoga* as one." Having just taugh us that the *two* paths are really *one*, in verse 13.24 He implies that there ar in fact, *three* paths: "By meditation some behold the Self in the self by th self, others by *Sankhya-yoga* and still others by *Karma-yoga*." The signif cance of these differing enumerations becomes obvious when we consid the use that rival advocates make of them. Those who would like to have th choice open rely on verses such as 5.4, 5. A Shankara, on the other han maintains that, as declared in verses 2.39, 3.3 the two paths *are* separa paths, that, in fact, the two are "incompatible" ("as are motion an rest"),[107] that *Karma-yoga* is for the ones with inferior endowments but th it may be regarded as a preparation for *Jnana-yoga* as it conduces to bett incarnations which ultimately lead one to a state where one can directl take to the path of knowledge. This is anathema to Tilak. Yes, the two path are distinct and separate and independent, he says, but *Karma-yoga* is neith inferior to nor a preparation for the path of knowledge; therefore, even th *jnanin* must continue to act with a disinterested frame of mind.[103] To bot Shankara and Tilak techniques of meditation would be just one of the dev ces that are useful in the path that each urges. Others, however, clutchin at verse 13.24, would urge that were one to spend all one's time in *Dhyan* *yoga* one would be spending it well.

As the next instance of equivocation consider verses 12 8-11 for a momen "Fix thy mind on Me exclusively, apply thy reason to Me. Thou shalt no doul live in Me alone hereafter. *If thou art unable to fix thy thought steadily c Me*, then by *yoga* of constant practice do thou seek to reach Me, O Dhananj ya. (*If*) *thou art not equal to practice either*, then be thou intent on (doin actions for My sake. Even doing actions for My sake, thou shalt attain pe fection. *If thou art unable to do even this*, then, self controlled, taking refu in devotion to Me, do thou abandon the fruits of all actions." Now, he the paths are being ranked according to their efficacy and, looking at th other side of the coin, by the ease by which an aspirant may adopt the In these stanzas Krishna would ideally want us to adopt the first, that i *dhyana-yoga*, to "fix thy mind exclusively on Me, apply thy reason to Me. Failing this, He would want us to busy ourselves in constant practice, in th untiring *abhyasa* of *dhyana*. And so on for the other two paths. Thus, th ranking in terms of desirability is, in descending order, (*i*) *dhyana*, (*i* *abhyasa* of *dhyana*, (*iii*) doing actions for His sake and, finally, (*iv*) renunci

[107]Sri Shankaracharya, *The Bhagvad Gita*, *op. cit.*, for instance, pp. 24-29, 88, 1 494.

[108]Tilak, *op. cit.*, for instance, pp. 422 ff.

tion of fruit by taking refuge in devotion to Him. The ranking according to ease is the converse of this.

But now comes the next verse (12.12): "Better indeed is knowledge than practice; than knowledge is meditation more esteemed; than meditation the abandonment of the fruits of action; on abandonment, peace follows immediately." Here the ranking, presumably on the criterion of desirability, is quite different: the best now is renunciation of fruit, then come, in descending order, *dhyana*, knowledge and practice at *dhyana*.

One can go on multiplying such examples, both of obscure passages that can be interpreted in several ways and also of rankings and exhortations that are, to say the least, ambivalent. The explanation, I think, consists in three factors: the first relates to the internal rule that the poet seems to be following in prescribing different paths, the second relates to the structure of the *Gita* as a poem and the third to its derivation.

The Upanishads, as we have seen, had put forward an austere and absolute goal, they had laid down an extremely demanding regimen for attaining that goal. Reflecting, as we noted earlier, upon the wide chasm between this doctrine and life, the author of the *Gita* set about to bring things down to a practical level. He seems to have been guided by the principle that he has had Krishna utter in verses 3.26 and 29, "let no wise man cause unsettlement in the minds of the ignorant who are attached to action. . . . He who knows the All should not unsettle the unwise who do not know the All." Thus, in contrast to the Upanishads, he adopts a more catholic approach as regards means, he tailors them according to inclinations and endowments of the aspirants. If they cannot at once go in for the most rarified mysticism, he does not want to lose them altogether, he does not want them to abandon the quest altogether, he would much rather that they adopt one of the other modes. We see this principle at work often. If we go by Shankara it is what leads to the repeated statements—Tilak would say the central statements—of the *Gita* in favour of *Karma:* seeing that Arjuna is not as yet well-enough equipped for *jnana*, Krishna commends the path of action to him. Discourses 11 and 12 provide other, more specific, examples of the same principle at work, the principle of prescribing only that course which the devotee can pursue.

It will be recalled that earlier in the *Gita* (for instance, in verses 7.24-25) Krishna has declared that His formless state is greater than the state in which He assumes varying forms (much on the lines that the former is the general case while the latter are its particular applications). He has also declared (for instance, in verses 7.20-3; 9.14) that *nirguna*-worship is superior to worship of His *saguna*-forms. The sequence in discourse 11, where He unveils His many forms, also implicitly affirms His formless state to be the more fundamental state in that the specific manifestations are but examples of that cosmic entity putting on different clothes for the comprehension of His devotees. But upon showing His universal form to Arjuna in that discourse He soon realizes that Arjuna does not yet have the capacity to visualize this form for long—Arjuna is awe-struck and beseeches Krishna to

quickly resume His human form. Therefore, when the question is considered (in verses 12.1-7) as to whether one should contemplate the manifest or unmanifest form, Krishna is consideration itself. He reassures Arjuna that though worship of the unmanifest is what leads directly to Him, it is very difficult, and, therefore, most should worship His manifest form and that, out of compassion for their devotion and capacity, He "ere long" delivers them also from the ocean of mortal *samsara*. In the subsequent verses too (12.8-11), as we have seen, He urges the devotee to employ any of four methods according to what is within his reach.

This then is the internal principle that seems to have guided the author of the *Gita*—the principle of prescribing modes that fit the varying capacities of the aspirants. As capacities differ, his prescriptions differ from discourse to discourse, from stanza to stanza. And this is what results in the ambivalence and the contradictions that we have noticed.

The second point relates to the structure of the *Gita* and like the first, it explains why the *Gita* is ambivalent, why one cannot assert that it is exclusively for works, for deeds and for nothing else. The *Gita*, like the Upanishads, is a loosely structured work. It is more organized than most of the Upanishads, but, considering that many of the latter are hardly organized at all, this isn't saying much. A topic is taken up and left, another inter-
venes only to be overshadowed by the next. While some stanzas follow
logically from the preceding stanza, while they continue the thought of the
preceding one, others do not. All this leaves much scope for imaginative
inferences, for imaginative constructions about what the poet's flow of
thought must have been in between the stanzas, for imaginative assertions
as to what should be read in relation to what. In the case of the Upa-
nishads, of course, the construction is very loose indeed. At many crucial
points they appear as the disjointed utterances of someone in a trance. In
some instances there is a sudden and unexpected change of subject, of mood,
of idiom, much as one encounters in, say, an Urdu *ghazal*. The *Gita*, as I
said, is only a bit more organized. Apart from everything else, this feature
leaves much scope for interpolation. It is true that the various manuscripts
in which the *Gita* has come down to us show a truly remarkable uniformity.
But this is no guarantee against interpolations either before it was finally
reduced to writing or subsequently. It does seem strange, after all, to men-
tion a trivial point, that *after*, as Sanjaya reports in verse 1.20, "the dis-
charge of weapons began," two of the principal combatants in a mighty war
should have had the time to discuss, among other things, the types of
asanas one should do, the types of food one should eat and so on. Given this
loose structure, the scope it gives for interpolation, etc , it is not surprising
that some passages are ambivalent and even contradictory.

The third feature that accounts for the ambivalence of the *Gita* and also, in part, for its contrary interpretations is that it is, all said and done, a *pot pouri*, a popular version, a popular restatement of the Upanishads. As the Upanishads themselves contain a host of passages on which contrary constructions can be put—and this matter we shall examine at length in the next

two chapters—the *Gita* also necessarily contains assertions with varying emphasis. As Tilak in a moment of candour says, "what is there which cannot be found in the *Gita*?"[109] The intrinsic ambivalence of the passages is compounded by the status of the *Gita* within the tradition. After all it is just *Smriti*, the remembered, not *Shruti*, the heard, as the Upanishads are. Accordingly, it is not enough to interpret the verses of the *Gita* by referring merely to other verses of the *Gita*. They have to be interpreted in the light of the Upanishads themselves. Now, as the primary reference material is diverse, ambiguous and itself contradictory, the constructions that can be put on the *Gita* are also naturally diverse and contradictory.

Apart from the popular standing of the text, this ambivalence must have been one of the features which has attracted each of our great reformers to it, which has led each to use it to advance his particularview point. And it is the same ambivalence of the text, its *pot pouri* flavour, which has meant that any reformer who has tried to assert on the basis of the *Gita* that it urges his point of view *to the exclusion* of other viewpoints has had to somersault again and again, to dilute his claims step by step.

A Shankara wants to read renunciation into it. But he has to concede again and again that *karma* is a means to knowledge and, from that, to emancipation.[110] He will assert, for instance, that Krishna has advocated the *karma*-path to Arjuna at the beginning of the fifth discourse only by looking at the specific limitations and the inadequate endowments of Arjuna, that Arjuna has asked Him to answer *his specific* predicament (in verse 5.1) and that (in verses 5.2-5) *this is all Krishna does. Seeing Arjuna is* not equipped for anything other than gross action, Krishna urges him to act, to fight, to do his caste duties.[111] But then he is hard put to explain why Krishna, having realized that Arjuna is not equipped for anything but gross action, then goes on in the subsequent discourses to expound *Jnana-yoga* and other aspects of esoteric lore to him.

Similarly, Tilak sets out to prove that the *Gita* propounds nothing but undiluted *Karma-yoga*: its message, he insists, is, "keep in mind the universal rule that 'nothing happens till something is done', and devote yourselves to desireless action; that is all."[112] But soon he is driven to ignoring many stanzas, to putting unwarranted meaning on to others, to stretching the meanings of words like *karma*, *yajna*, *mithya*, to conjuring up patently untenable arguments. For reasons of space I must confine myself to just three typical examples.

In arguing, for instance, that the distinctive message of the *Gita* is *Karma-*

[109] Tilak, *op. cit.*, p. 661.

[110] Sri Shankaracharya, *The Bhagvad Gita*, *op. cit.*, for instance, pp. 5, 28, 58, 63, 66, 94-95, 127, 135-136, 177-181, 450. He tries to retrieve the concessions he is forced to make by making light of them—action is called *yoga* "only as a figure of speech," he says (*ibid.*, p. 366), the ignorant men immersed in *karma* are called "abandoners" in 18.11 "only for courtesy's sake" (*ibid.*, p. 452), so on. But this is just whistling to keep up one's spirits.

[111] *Ibid.*, for instance, pp. 89-91.

[112] Tilak, *op. cit.*, p. xxxi.

Gandhi, as we shall see in Chapter 11, is in the same predicament when he tries to infer from the *Gita* not just *anashakti-yoga* but also non-violence. He is hard put, as we shall see, to establishing that the war being talked of was only figurative, that the war that is meant is only the eternal battle in our hearts between good and evil, that the Kauravas were not meant to be real persons, just our base instincts, that in asking Arjuna to slay them Krishna was not urging a violent deed, He was only asking Arjuna to conquer his evil passions.

But more about this later. Our subject for the moment is the ambivalence of the *Gita* and how this ambivalence has enabled our reformers to infer different messages from the *Gita* but how it has also forced them into sleights-of-hand whenever they have insisted that the *Gita* advocates their message to the exclusion of other messages.

Inadequacy of Its "Central Message"

"But you mean there is no unity, no central message underlying the *Gita* at all?"

The "central message" that would do the least violence to the text taken as a whole would, it seems to me, revolve around the following propositions: submergence in Brahman is the one great goal; there are many paths to this goal; each aspirant should adopt the path most suited to his endowments; while the realized souls need not act at all, for most of us action is a means provided we abjure attachment (including in this fondness as well as aversion) to the objects of action as well as any longing for the prospective fruit of what we do.

This view is, as we noted earlier, a giant step ahead of the Upanishads. But it is not a decisive step.

First, we should note the tautology that hides behind the *via media* adopted by the *Gita*. Action if performed with a perfectly detached mind, we are told, will not ruffle the mind, it will not leave any residue of impressions on the mind and, therefore, it will not entail bondage. And when do we know that our mind is "perfectly detached"? When action leaves no impression on it! Similarly, while it is now clear that detachment adds to what the *Gita* calls "excellence in action," that detachment enables us to concentrate wholly on the task itself, that our hand is not unsteadied by the anxiety of failure. But how do we leap from this empirical fact to the deduction that such action will not "bind"? Moreover, as we shall see later, if the assurance that detachment ensures that action does not bind is taken literally then it sanctions evil actions as much as actions entailing good for others.

Second, the *Gita* is handicapped in universalizing our concerns, of making the war against an unjust order *everyone's* cause by that great flaw in our tradition—our caste-consciousness. For at so many points it legitimizes the existing order; at so many points Krishna declares Himself to be the author of the existing state of affairs, of Himself being, for instance, the One who has created the castes and put each person in the slot in

which he is. Even His call to take up arms on the side of righteousness is caste-specific: "... seeing thine own duty thou should'st not shrink from it (the war); for there is no higher good," Krishna says in verses 2.31, 32, "*for a Kshatriya* than a righteous war. Such a war, coming unsought, as a gateway to heaven thrown open, falls only to the lot of happy *Kshatriyas*, O Partha." Well, if it is a righteous war why should waging it be propitious only for the *Kshatriyas*?

The third point to remember is that while, in a sense, the *Gita* urges action, it is distinctive in doing so. The overwhelming bulk of the passages in the Upanishads urge withdrawal, a progressive diminution of all actions, and this even Tilak—who is so keen to squeeze every drop of activism from the literature that he can possibly find—often acknowledges. Following the Mimansa rules, Tilak says that one way to discern the message of a work is to look for the propositions in it which are *not* found in other works; that is, one way to locate the message of a work is to look for its *distinctive* message, the message that differentiates it, that sets it apart from other works. Using this criterion Tilak affirms that the message of the *Gita* is *Karma-yoga* for while it urges this, the others do not. We have already seen that the former part of the proposition (that the *Gita* urges *Karma-yoga*) is true only to a limited extent; we have also seen how its urging of *Karma-yoga* is marred by equivocation. In the latter part of this proposition—that the *Gita* differs from the other texts in that it urges action—we have Tilak's own verdict about the renunciatory message of the Upanishads.[118] Recall now that the *Gita* is just *Smriti* and there is a clear rule in the tradition that where the *Smriti* contradicts or is not in consonance with the *Shruti*—in this case the Upanishads—it is to be disregarded. Where does this rule, taken together with Tilak's verdict that the *Gita* differs from the Upanishads in urging deeds, leave the *Gita's* activist passages?

As we are examining the *Gita* to find out what it tells us about the society in which it was honoured, we should, and this is the fourth point to bear in mind, ask: modern advocates apart, what meaning did the great seers of the past read into the *Gita*; which of the several possible interpretations dominated the public mind? Again, we have to go no farther than Tilak's assessment of the matter. He acknowledges that it is Shankara's interpretation—combining the non-dualist world-view with *Karma*-renunciation—that dominated the minds of the populace all through these centuries.[119] In fact, he goes so far as to say that in urging that the *Gita* urges *Karma-yoga* above all else he is the first to do so.[120] This

[118]Of course, Tilak also and often directly acknowledges that the message of the Upanishads is renunciatory. For some examples see *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8, 15-17, 82, 479, 486-91, 656, 663.

[119]*Ibid.*, for instance, pp. 18-20, 555, 666.

[120]*Ibid.*, pp. XXVI. Tilak's anxiety to stretch every argument as far as it can be stretched is evident on this matter also. He says that Shankara's *bhashya* on the *Gita* is the earliest one we have and so we do not really know what interpretations of

is an important admission from a partisan, eager as he was to highlight every bit of activism in the texts. And why is it that Shankara's construction of the *Gita's* message, as of the message of other texts, is the one that exercised such a dominating influence for so many centuries? Simply because it is the one that follows most naturally from the basic texts, the Upanishads. The only way in which his interpretation could have been dislodged would have been to repudiate the texts themselves and this his combatants, barring the aberrant *Charvakas*, were never prepared to do.

And so it came about that the argument for works and deeds that the author of the *Gita* tried to graft on to the tradition was quietly set aside.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND A SOCIAL CONSCIENCE

The Upanishads urge a number of conventional virtues. The ten *yamas* and the ten *niyamas* have already been referred to in Chapter 5. Assorted passages urge sacrifices, "begetting and procreation," the giving of alms with faith, modesty, fear, sympathy and generosity, fulfilling one's duties to the Gods, one's father, to one's guests; others ask us to quell anger, to be tranquil, upright, harmless, restrained, austere, desireless, with our passions calmed, friendly, content, soft, fearless, constant, indifferent, inactive, affable, suave of speech and so on.

The implications of the world-view for ethics, for our acquiring a social conscience, for our developing a sense of social responsibility cannot, however, be discerned by stringing together these passages about conventional virtues. For the basic question is as follows: if man is declared to be an indescribable non-corporeality, if all empirical relationships are declared to be

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the *Gita's* message were put forward between the writing of the Mahabharata and
Shankara's commenting on it. However, he goes on to say, Shankara himself tells us
that he has written his commentary to refute those who would have us believe that
the *Gita* asks us to engage in *Karma*. From this, Tilak concludes, we can directly
infer that though those commentaries are not available to us, there definitely were
activist interpretations of the *Gita* (*ibid.*, pp. 15-16). Now, as anyone who reads
Shankara's commentary will realize, the activism that Shankara is so concerned to
refute (and which we can, therefore, infer was being urged) was not one saying, "go,
fight righteous wars, for the *Gita* teaches you to do so." This is not Shankara's con-
cern at all in his commentary. The activism he is preoccupied in combating is one
that says "everyone must go on performing rituals and sacrifices throughout his life."
And Shankara labours to prove that according to the *Gita* neither the *sannyasi* nor
the *jnanin* need perform any of these. In any case, the point I want to stress is a
different one. Notice what Tilak's attitude is to the non-extant activist interpretations;
we do not have them, but, he insists, we can be certain they were there. Now, a
moment later he says, "If there had been any commentary on the *Gita* before the
date of Shankaracharya, interpreting it as favouring Asceticism, such a commentary
is not now available. Therefore, we must say that the *first* attempt to deprive the
Gita of its Energistic form and give it a Renunciatory doctrinal form was made by
Shankaracharya" (*ibid.*, p. 20). Our not having them does not keep Tilak from assert-
ing that activist interpretations of the *Gita* existed but the same fact—our not having
the renunciatory interpretations—is enough to convince him that they never existed!

chimerical, if the empirical world itself is declared to be non existent, then where is the place for ethics, where is the scope for urging us to look at and help alleviate the privations of our fellowmen? What, as Schweitzer once asked, has *ethics to do in an unreal world*?[121] Where is the question of social responsibility in a society that does not even exist? After all, as the undifferentiated pure consciousness alone is, there is neither the hunter, nor the hunted, neither the exploiter nor the exploited, neither the opulent nor the starving, neither what is pleasing nor what is unbearable, neither the thief nor the robbed, ". . .nor misdemeanour, nor rapacity. . . ."[122]

Obviously, therefore, the pure version of the doctrine, precisely the version that hagiographers are apt to describe as the farthest flight of the human mind etc., has to be given up before ethics can be derived.

"How is it that the Upanishads, *Gita*, etc., the contain ethical *dicta* if, as you say, ethics just cannot be derived from the basic world-view they contain?" The explanation is really quite simple. These works, as we noted a short while ago, are ill-organized. At best they record the spontaneous outpourings of *yogin*-s in a trance, outpourings that are sporadic and unconnected, that by their nature do not follow each other in any logical sequence. (This is the case if we take the most charitable view of the texts, that is if we ignore the almost certain interpolations, deletions, mistakes, deliberate mutilations, etc., all of the latter diminishing even further any hope we may have of finding a consistent, logical account of the world-view and of its implications.) Accordingly, what happens is simply that just as there are affirmations about Brahman, Atman, sacrificial rites, rituals, physiology, cosmology and what have you, there are also affirmations about what constitutes ethical conduct. No attempt is made to derive the latter from the basic world-view of the texts; hence no contradiction is noticed in declaring in one and the same breath that the world does not exist and also prescribing norms that must govern the conduct of individuals towards each other in that very world.

Let us assume, however, that the pure version of the doctrine has been set aside, see how ethics can be derived in that event and then assess whether the diluted form of the doctrine provides a sufficient scaffolding for ethics.

DERIVATION OF ETHICS

The Upanishadic peg on which ethics has been hung by commentators—including recent ones like Tilak, etc.—is the affirmation that the essence of each person—the Atman—is the same, every Atman being Brahman, and that, therefore, each of us must work for the interests of all.

This derivation proceeds in four steps and we should consider them in some detail before we assess their adequacy as a scaffolding.

[121] A. Schweitzer, *Indian Thought and its Development*, Adam and Charles Black, London, 1951, *et passim*.
[122] *Tejo-bindupanishad*, VI. 3-33.

The first step is of recalling the identity of each Atman with Brahman and of affirming that it is this identity which must govern our attitude to all others.

The sixth verse from the *Ishopanishad* sets the stage:

> Now, *he who on all beings looks as just in the Self, And on the Self as in all beings*—He does not shrink away from Him.

The *Gita*, as is well known, echoes this precept again and again:

> He who is equipped with *yoga*, whose mind is pure, by whom the self has been conquered, whose senses have been subdued, *whose Self has become the Self of all beings*—though acting, he is not tainted. (5.7)

> *The Self abiding in all beings and all beings (abiding) in the Self*, sees he whose self has been made steadfast by *yoga*, who everywhere sees the same. (6.29)

> *He who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me*, to him I vanish not, nor to Me does he vanish. (6.30)

> Who so, intent on unity, worships Me *who abide in all beings*, that *yogin* dwells in Me whatever his mode of life. (6.31)

> He sees who sees the Supreme Lord *remaining the same in all beings*, the undying in the dying. (13.27)

> When a man realizes *the whole variety of beings as resting in the One*, and as an evolution from that (One) alone, then he becomes Brahman. (13.30)

Or, as we learn in the last discourse,

> That by which a man sees *the one Indestructible Reality in all beings*, inseparate in the separated, that knowledge know thou to be *Sattvik*. But that knowledge which by differentiation sees in all the creatures various entities of distinct kinds, that knowledge know thou as *Rajasik*. But that which clings to one single effect as if it were all, without reason, having no real object, and narrow, that is declared to be *Tamasik*. (18.20-22)

From this knowledge two operational inferences are supposed to follow. Let us follow the *Gita* again in deriving them. The first (as verse 18.54 puts it) is that the knower "treats all beings alike," that (to take verse 5.18 as another example) he sees the same "in a cow, in an elephant, as also in a dog and in a dog-eater (the *Chandala*)." Second, as the knower sees the same Self in all beings, as he has completely transcended all selfishness, all egotism, all notions of his own individuality, he now devotes himself

entirely to the welfare of all beings (verses 3.25; 5.25, etc). This is how Krishna Himself acts, this is why Janaka and others are said to have continued to toil even though they could have submerged in Brahman from the moment they attained the Sovereign Knowledge.

Now, and this is the second step in the derivation of ethics, it is presumed that one who has internalized this knowledge, the *jnanin*, will automatically be rid of all inclinations to do evil. "As to a mountain that is enflamed," says the *Maitreyopanishad*, "deer and birds do not resort, so, with Brahman-knowers, faults never find any shelter."[123] The knower, says the *Nrisimha-Tapiny Upanishad*, "overcomes sin by staying clear of it."[124] "He who practices this *Vidya*," repeats the *Vasu-devaopanishad*, is purified from all sins (as) the inclination for sinful action will never arise in him."[125] (In case we notice the *jnanin* doing something which to our limited understanding seems sinful or untoward, then we must realize that the deficiency is in *our* understanding; there must be some higher, some hidden purpose behind the *jnanin*'s apparent transgression.)

Thus far we have seen how the wise, knowing that the same Self pervades all beings, give up all personal interests, how they are cleansed of all inclination to do evil and how they devote themselves to the welfare of all beings. Now comes the third step in the derivation and it consists in an exhortation to us lesser mortals: follow the wise, do as they do, as they work for the welfare of all beings in general, so should you, as they desist from evil, so should you. We should follow them, we should do as they do, for the question of what should and what should not be done is a perplexing one, even the wise have difficulty in seeing the way at times—"What is action, what is inaction, as to this," says the *Gita* (verse 4.16) "even the wise are deluded"—so we had better follow them.

The *Gita* assumes at times[126] that the populace *normally* or *naturally* follows the wise; other texts, assuming less of us, *exhort* us to follow them; still others, assuming less not just of us but also of the wise, the *gurus*, exhort us to follow only those of the latter's acts that are meritorious:

> Those acts which are irreproachable should be practised, and no others: Those things which among us are good deeds should be revered by you, and no others.[127]

In any case—whether naturally or deliberately, whether indiscriminately or with our eyes open—we are to follow the wise. Now, and here is the derivation we were looking for, as the wise act ethically, we, in following them, will also act ethically.

[123] *Maitreyopanishad*, 6-18.
[124] *Nrisimha-Tapinyupanishad, Purva-Tapini*, 2.1. [125] *Vasu-devopanishad*, 26.
[126] For instance, verse 3.21 which states, "whatsoever a great man does, that alone the other men do, whatever he sets up as the standard, that the world follows."
[127] *Taittiriyopanishad*, 1.11.2.

And what are the elements of conduct that the wise have found useful in their quest to the Sovereign Knowledge? The answer to this question constitutes the fourth step in the derivation. For the one way in which the different traits that are listed as desirables can be inferred from the basic view is to look upon the various lists as embodying the experimental wisdom of the *jnanin*-s, as being the notings about useful traits, attitudes, etc., that they jotted down along their ascent.

The *Gita's* scattered listings of desirable traits constitute a representative enumeration. We should be single-minded in pursuing the objective—the great knowledge (2.41).[128] Each should be ever satisfied in the Self by himself (2.53, 55; 5.7, 17, 21; 6.8, 18, 20, 22; 13.11; 15.5), steady in devotion to the works required for attaining the objective (2.48; 3.31, 32; 4.10). We should steady our mind (2.66; 4.21; 5.26; 6.10, 19, 20, 26, 28; 8.7, 8; 12.13, 14). To do so we should cast off all desires (2.55, 56, 70, 71; 15.5) and all attachments (2.48, 56, 57, 71; 5.10; 6.35; 12.18, 19; 13.8, 9, 20-1; 15.5; 18.7-10, 26, 49), bringing our senses under control (2.60, 61, 67; 4.39; 5.7; 6.8, 24; 12.4, 13-14; 13.7; 16.1; 18.49). To do so we should approach all objects of the senses with complete detachment (2.64; 3.34) or, better still, we should completely withdraw from them (2.58, 62-3, 68; 5.21-4; 6.4; 13.8). All this will require constant practice and perseverance (3.31-2; 4.39-41; 5.25; 6.35, 36, 45; 8.8; 9.1) and for that one needs unflinching faith and devotion (4.39-41; 7.17, 29; 13.10; 16.1) because doubters and those who cavil are ruined (3.31, 32; 9.1; 4.39-41; 5.25). The two traits most often mentioned are renouncing all attachment to the prospective fruit of one's deeds (2.49, 51; all of III; 4.19; 5.12) and equanimity, equableness between opposites whether these be heat and cold, success and failure, praise and opprobium, friends and foes, pleasure and pain, gain or loss, the lovely and the hateful, the pleasant and unpleasant etc. (2.15, 38, 45, 48, 56, 57, 64, 3.34; 4.22; 5.3, 18-20; 6.7-9, 32-3; 7.27, 28; 12.4, 13-15, 17-19; 13.8-9; 14.24-5; 15.5; 18 26). In addition we must rise above lust, greed, wrath (2.56; 4.10; 5.23, 26; 16.21, 22), egoism and selfishness (2.71; 3.31; 13.8), pride and vanity (2.71; 15.5), envy (4.22; 12.15), fear (2.56; 3.30; 4.10; 16.1), etc. We must be austere, satisfied with whatever comes our way, initially giving up acquisitiveness and then all possessions (2.45; 4.21; 22, 14.22-3, 26). And so on. The following, *portmanteau* enumerations will give the reader a flavour of these prescriptions:

> He who hates no single being, who is friendly and compassionate to all, who is free from attachment and egoism, to whom pain and pleasure are equal, who is enduring, ever content and balanced in mind, self-controlled, and possessed of firm conviction, whose thought and reason are directed to Me, he who is (thus) devoted to Me is dear to Me.
>
> He by whom the world is not afflicted and who is not afflicted by the

[128] Figures in parentheses refer to representative verses of the *Gita* in which the reader will find allusions to the traits.

world, who is free from joy, envy, fear and sorrow, he is dear to Me.

He who is free from wants, who is pure, clever, unconcerned, untroubled, renouncing all undertakings, he who is (thus) devoted to Me is dear to Me.

He who neither rejoices, nor hates, nor grieves, nor desires, renouncing good and evil, he who is full of devotion is dear to Me.

He who is the same to foe and friend, and also in honour and dishonour; who is the same in cold and heat, in pleasure and pain; who is free from attachment; to whom censure and praise are equal; who is silent, content with anything, homeless, steady-minded, full of devotion; that man is dear to Me.[129]

Humility, modesty, innocence, patience, uprightness, service of the teacher, purity, steadfastness, self-control;

Absence of attachment for objects of the senses, and also absence of egoism, perception of evil in birth, death and old age, in sickness and pain;

Unattachment, absence of affection for son, wife, home and the like, and constant equanimity on the attainment of the desirable and the undesirable;

Unflinching devotion to Me in *yoga* of non-separation, resort to solitary places, distaste for the society of men;

Constancy in Self-knowledge, perception of the end of the knowledge of truth. This is declared to be knowledge, and what is opposed to it is ignorance.[130]

Fearlessness, purity of heart, steadfastness in knowledge and *yoga*, almsgiving, self-restraint and worship, study of one's own scriptures, austerity, uprightness;

Harmlessness, truth, absence of anger, renunciation, serenity, absence of calumny, compassion to creatures, uncovetousness, gentleness, modesty, absence of fickleness;

Energy, forgiveness, fortitude, purity, absence of hatred, absence of pride; these belong to one born for a divine lot, O Bharata.

Ostentation, arrogance and self-conceit anger as also insolence, and ignorance, belong to one who is born, O Partha, for a demoniac lot.

The divine nature is deemed for liberation, the demoniac for bondage. Grieve not, O Pandava, thou art born for a divine lot.[131]

These virtues are commended repeatedly. On occasion we are informed that if one were to acquire them even at the moment of one's death, one would reap great reward.[132]

[129] *Bhagvad Gita*, XII. 13-19.
[130] *Ibid.*, XIII. 7-11.
[131] *Ibid.*, XVI. 1-5.
[132] In the *Gita's* case, see, for instance, 2.72; 8.5, 6, 9-13, 23-26.

One can go on adding to this list of prescribed virtues. One can go on alluding to passages that affirm their importance. But the question is, do the four propositions that have been put forward—all Ātman's are Brahman, thus the wise perceive all alike, they act solely for the well-being of mankind in general, we should do as they do, paying particular attention to the traits that they have experimentally found to be vital—do these constitute an adequate basis for ethics? Do they provide a firm enough scaffolding for a social conscience, a sense of social responsibility, of responsibility for the state of affairs and a determination to improve it?

I think not. And that, in ascending order of importance, for five reasons.

COMMENTARY

The first point is simplicity itself. If one goes by the internal evidence of the Upanishads themselves, (and remember that on this, as on other matters, *every* word, *every* stanza in them is revelation) then one need not be overly concerned about doing good or ill for should one perchance do ill, warding off its effects upon oneself is as easy as can be.

The *agnihotri* sacrifice,[133] worship of the Sun,[134] uttering some simple *Mantra* every day,[135] the uttering of even merely remembering a *Mantra* in praise of Rama,[136] reciting the *Anustabh Mantra* in praise of Nrisimha[137], the glorifying of Rudra as "Sri Rudra, Rudra, Rudra" and so on,[138] wearing the *Rudraksha-mala*,[139] worshipping the *Linga*, bathing it with milk and curds of a tawny-coloured cow, muttering *Rudra-sukta* and drinking the milk flowing out of the *Linga* thrice,[140] wearing the *Tripundra* marks,[141] remembering Vishnu,[142] discoursing on the middle *nadi*, the *Sushumna*,[143] uttering the *Pranava*,[144] uttering the *Hamsa Mantra*, which, as the *Dhyanabindupanishad* tells us, we utter automatically 21,600 times every day and night with our inhaling and exhaling[145]—any one of these and many other devices, we are assured, will burn away all our sins. Scores and scores of Upanishads tell us that all our sins will be burnt away by studying them. One or two are a bit finicky saying that the sins will be burnt away if we study them daily[146] or if we study them a total of ten times.[147] But many of them ask much less of us. The *Advaya-Tarakopanishad*, for instance, says that if we so much as "cause it to be read for once," all our sins would

[133] *Chandogyopanishad*, V. 24. 1-3.
[134] *Suryopanishad*, 7, 8.
[135] *Kaushitakepanishad*, II. 7.
[136] *Rama-Tapiniyupanishad*, *Uttara Tapini*, V. 6-34.
[137] *Nrisimha-Tapiniyupanishad*, *Purva Tapini*, V. 11-18.
[138] *Rudrahridayopanishad*, 16-25.
[139] *Rudrakshajabalopanishad*, 6, 7, 44-45.
[140] *Bhasmajabalopanishad*, II. 18-20, II. 22.
[141] *Brhajjabalopanishad*, IV. 32-41.
[142] *Krishnopanishad*, II. 1.
[143] *Yogasikhopanishad*, VI. 41-46.
[144] *Dhyanabindupanishad*, 14-18; *Yogachudamaniyopanishad*, 88; *Yogatattvopanishad*, 63-64; *Varahopanishad*, V. 63-71.
[145] *Dhyanabindupanishad*, 61-65.
[146] *Devi Upanishad*, 31.
[147] *Mudgalopanishad*, IV. 10.

vanish.[148] Similarly, the *Sarabhopanishad* promises to burn all our sins away if we even "cause it to be expounded to others."[149]

The reader must remember that each and all of these devices are said not to wash away some minor delinquencies but, as the Upanishads say repeatedly, "*the most heinous sins*," "*all sins committed through all previous births*," "all sins, great and small," sins "in their tens and thousands and crores and crores of thousands"—all these are said to be burnt at the touch of any one of the devices "as a mountain of cotton wool burns at the touch of fire."

Nor do the Upanishads stop at vague phrases such as "all sins" etc. They spell out the types of sins that each of these devices burns away: the sin of addiction to spiritous liquor, of stealing gold and precious gems, of forgetting the Vedas, of failing to maintain the sacred fire, of failing to serve one's *Guru*, of eating prohibited food, of associating with degraded, morally depraved people guilty of grave crimes, of killing Brahmins ("in the thousands"), of killing a child in the womb, of killing a child, of slaughtering, a cow, a horse, one's *Guru*, one's mother, one's father, of having intercourse with a woman of a low caste, with one's mother, one's daughter, one's daughter-in-law, the wife of one's *Guru*, the wife of any other man. And so on and on.[150]

And in each instance relief is immediate. Indeed, it is the last word in promptness. We are repeatedly told that if we were but to do the prescribed deed (for instance, reading the Upanishad, causing it to be read, wearing the marks or the *mala*, reciting the *Mantra*, etc.), if we were to do so in the morning all sins committed by us during the night would vanish, if we were to do so at noon all sins committed during the forenoon would vanish, if we were to do so during the evening all sins committed during the day would vanish.[151]

[148] *Advaya-Tarakopanishad*, 19. [149] *Sarabhopanishad*, 35-39.

[150] For representative passages listing these illustrative sins see *Mudgalopanishad*, 10; *Suryopanishad*, 8; *Advaya-Tarakopanishad*. 19; *Tejo-bindupanishad*, III. 60-70; *Brahmavidyopanishad*. 49-51; *Kaivalyopanishad*, 25-26; *Brhajjabalopanishad*, VI. 6-15; *Bhasmajabalopanishad*, I. 11, II. 22; *Rudrahridayopanishad*, 16-25; *Rudrakshajabalopanishad*, 26-42, 49; *Sarabhopanishad*, 35-39; *Avyaktopanishad*, VII. 1; *Kali-Samtaranopanishad*, 3; *Tripad-Vibhuti-Maha-Narayanopanishad*, VIII. 19-24; *Dattareyopanishad*, I. 7, III. 1; *Nrisimha-Tapinyupanishad*, *Purva-Tapini*, V. 11-18; *Rama-Tapinyupanishad*, II. 4, V. 6-34; *Rama-Rahasyopanishad*, I. 11-15, V. 18-19; *Haya-grivopanishad*, 12.

[151] For instance, see *Mahavakyopanishad*, 12; *Devi Upanishad*, 32; *Aksamalikopanishad*, 16; *Krishnopanishad*, II. 1; *Narayanopanishad*, IV; *Ganapatyopanishad*, 16; *Rudrakshajabalopanishad*, 49. The Upanishads are not so other-worldly as to promise only the burning away of sins. The passages referred to in footnotes 150 and 151 promise for the same deeds many *worldly rewards too*: immunity from piles, epilepsy and incurable diseases, from inauspicious signs and omens, the misery of cares, all grief, lust, anger, mental processes, volitions, "crores of *doshas* or faults," abject dependence on all, famines, pestilence; *they promise that instead of these we will attain Dharma, Karma Artha* as well as *Moksha*, the fulfilment of all our hearts' desires, honour, sovereignty over the entire world with "even Kings carrying out your mandate," celestial bliss and much else that is delectable.

If this is all there is to the matter, why must one be all that punctilious about ethics, about social responsibility, about a social conscience? After all, if the consequences of these varieties of murder, adultery and incest—things which the tradition views with such horror—can be so easily overcome, what great calamity can arise from the neglect of one's social responsibilities, a neglect that does not even figure as much of a sin?

Just as the aspirant is assured easy and prompt exculpation, the *jnanin*, and this is the second factor we have to keep in mind while assessing the adequacy of the scaffolding for ethics, is at once elevated into a supra-ethical state.

He is no longer concerned about having done right or wrong, of having been just or unjust:

> Him (who knows this) these two do not overcome—neither the thought, 'Hence I did wrong,' nor the thought, 'Hence I did right.' Verily, he overcomes them both. What he has done and what he has not done do not affect him. . . .[152]

> Such a one, verily, the thought does not torment: 'Why have I not done the good? Why have I done the evil?' He who knows this, delivers himself from these two (thoughts). For truly, from both of these he delivers himself—he who knows this . . . .[153]

Indeed, as the Upanishads and the *Gita* emphasize repeatedly, all opposites (notions like right and wrong, justice and injustice being just particular examples) are a function of duality. They can exist only so long as one is still lost in differentiation and duality. But when knowledge has dawned, when one has become one with Brahman then there just isn't any room for these notions. As Yajnavalkya explains to the eager Maitreyi,

> Then spake Maitreyi: 'Herein, indeed you have bewildered me, sir—in saying: "After death there is no consciousness"!'
>
> Then spake Yajnavalkya: 'Lo, verily, I speak not bewilderment. Sufficient, lo, verily, is this for understanding.
>
> 'For where there is a duality, as it were, there one smells another; there one sees another; there one hears another; there one speaks to another; there one speaks of another; there one understands another. Where, verily, everything has become just one's own self, then whereby and whom would one smell? Then whereby and whom one would see? Then whereby and whom would one hear? Then whereby and to whom would one speak? Then whereby and on whom would one think? Then whereby and whom would one understand? Whereby would one understand him by whom one understands this All? Lo, whereby would one understand the understander?[154]

[152] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, 4.4.22.
[153] *Taittiriyopanishad*, 2.9.
[154] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, 2.4. 13-14; also 4.4.22.

Is this not an accurate description of the stance of a Ramana Maharsh or a Shirdi-*ke*-Sai Baba towards the sufferings of the world?

Thus the knowledge that the tradition commends does not plunge one into activities that are needed to break the vice that holds one's fellow-men in its grip. Instead it elevates one to a supra-ethical state.

"But doesn't this exemption—like the exemption from deeds you cited earlier—apply only to a few individuals? After all, how many *jnanin*-s are there at any time? Aren't the rest of us urged to and obliged to involve ourselves in the struggles of the world?"

The answer is straightforward: the transcendence, the ultimate unconcern which marks the knower is the ideal that, in the tradition, all must continually strive towards; and so each of us is obliged to progressively attenuate our concerns, our outrage at injustice, our anger at the privation that is heaped upon our fellow-men.

The third reason on account of which the four propositions listed above do not constitute an adequate foundation for ethics is that, going again by the internal evidence of the Upanishads and the *Gita*, no act done with perfect detachment, no act done after complete surrender to the Lord, no act done with the complete conviction that one is but being an instrument for the Lord's work, binds. Krishna is free from bondage not because He does not act (He says again and again in the *Gita* that He most certainly does, to keep the world going [3.22-4], to vanquish evil and restore good [4.7,8], etc.) but because He acts out of complete detachment. "Nor do these acts bind Me, O Dhananjaya," Krishna explains in the *Gita* (9.9), "remaining (as I do) like one unconcerned, unattached to those acts." This counsel the *Gita* reaffirms again and again:

> Here in this world a man gifted with that attitude of detachment escapes the fruit of both good and evil deeds. Gird thyself up for *yoga*, therefore. *yoga* is skill in action. . . . (2.50)

> He who has renounced attachment to the fruit of action, who is ever content, and free from all dependence, he, though immersed in action, yet acts not. . . . Expecting naught, holding his mind and body in check, putting away every possession, and going through action only in the body he incurs no stain. . . . Content with whatever change may bring, rid of the pairs of opposites, free from ill-will, even-minded in success and failure, he is not bound though he acts. . . . Of the free soul who has shed all attachement, whose mind is firmly grounded in knowledge, who acts only for sacrifice, all *karma* is extinguished. . . . (4.20-3)

> He who dedicates his actions to Brahman and performs them without attachment is not smeared by sin, as the lotus-leaf by water. . . . (5.10)

And for this reason in the final discourse Krishna reminds Arjuna: "He who is free from egotistic notions, whose mind is not tainted, though he kills

these creatures, he kills not, he is not bound" (18.17). This is also the reason on account of which Krishna Himself, for all his amorous adventures, is declared by the Upanishads to have been a celibate:

> 'How shall we wade across the (deep) waters of the Jamuna, (to bestow our hospitality on Durvasas), wherewith to attain final beatitude?' (asked the *Gopi*-s) 'Do you proceed uttering the words, Sri Krishna (is) the Celibate (that has rigidly kept his vow of celibacy). The Jamuna will surely yield to you the way across,' replied Krishna unto them, '(for the reason that) the unfordable becomes fordable, the moment one remembers me, who am that Krishna, (for the reason that) the polluted becomes purified the moment he calls to mind, me, who am that Krishna, (for the reason that) he who has not kept his vow becomes a rigid keeper of the vow the moment he brings back to memory me, who am that Krishna, (for the reason that) one, who is full of passionate desires, becomes thoroughly detached, on his remembering me, who am that Krishna, (for the reason that) one who is not conversant with the sacred revelations of the Vedas, becomes thoroughly grounded in the Vedas, on remembering me, who am that Krishna, (for the reason that) all unfordable and unfathomable rivers also become easily fordable if only (the person wishing to get across) remembers me, who am that Krishna.' (The unsophisticated *Gopi*-s) on listening to these words (of sophistry from Krishna's mouth) remembered (with a good deal of trepidation) the irascible sage Durvasas, (a portion of Rudra incarnate), they crossed the Jamuna, (the daughter of the Sun), with the muttering of Krishna's formula, reached the most hallowed hermitage, prostrated themselves before that most exalted sage, Durvasas, and propitiated him, by giving this great knower of the Brahman food of the most excellent quality, exceedingly savoury, mixed with plenty of milk and *ghee*. Delighted with the gift, the sage partook of it after taking his bath, and after leaving off (offal as prescribed), he pronounced his benediction (on his hosts) and gave them leave to depart.... Thereupon Gandharvi, the best among the *Gopi*-s, asked the sage to explain unto them as to how Krishna, (the *Parmatman*), (that is the *Antaryamin*, that penetrates into the inmost core of all beings), could be (understood by them) as a rigid keeper of the vow of celibacy.... (The sage then told them) 'Out of the Brahman sprout forth the two *Suparna*-s (the two beautiful leaves that go together, attached to the single tender sprout), (*viz*., the *Jiva* and the *Ishvara*). (Of these two) the one that develops individuality, (the *Jiva*), is the enjoyer. The other, that is, verily, the witness, the *Ishvara*, (is the non-enjoyer). The two stand in the relationship of (the diverging parts of) the tree in worldly existence, (the one, the shoots and branches, deriving all the nourishment and the other, the vital principle, remaining locked up in the tree). Hence they stand as the enjoyer and the non-enjoyer (respectively). The former, (the *Jiva*) is the actual enjoyer. So also, the latter (the *Ishvara*, the *Saakshi-tattva*), that is the non-enjoyer, is Krishna (the Paramatman). Wherein, (in the

Ishvara, that is quite different from what constitutes *Vidya* and *Avidya*), we do not discover either knowledge or ignorance, how can that (Krishna) that stands exclusively differentiated from knowledge and ignorance and their concomitants and is of the exclusive character of the real existence (the Brahman alone), how can he become the enjoyer (encompassed by worldly concerns)? . . . . (The *Jiva*) that hankers after sensual pleasures, purely with a view to enjoy them, becomes addicted to desire. On the other hand, (the *Ishvara*) that confronts sensual pleasures, as they occur in the usual course, altogether with a detached frame of mind, becomes by no means addicted to desire . . . .[155]

Detachment, then, exempts one and absolute detachment exempts absolutely. If we assume, then, for the sake of argument that both Gandhi and Godse did all they did out of perfect detachment, does the proposition not put their deeds at par? Would the common lecher be any less of a celebate than Krishna *if he too were to fornicate with Krishna's detachment?*

The point thus is that the singular criterion of detachment sanctions evil deeds as much as socially responsible deeds.

For the same reason on account of which Krishna is a celibate, every knower of the Sovereign Secret too is completely unaffected by his deeds:

As water adheres not to the leaf of a lotus flower so evil action adheres not to him who knows this . . . . Now, when one is thus sound asleep, composed, serene, he knows no dream; then he has crept into these channels; so no evil touches him, for then he has reached the Bright Power . . . .[156]

So he who understands Me—by no deed whatsoever of his is his world injured, not by stealing, not by killing an embryo, not by the murder of his mother, not by the murder of his father; if he has done any evil, the dark color departs not from his face . . . .[157]

When a seer sees the brilliant
Maker, Lord, Person, the Brahma-source,
Then, being a knower, shaking off good and evil,
Stainless, he attains supreme identity (with Him) . . . .[158]

As such the knower, *in any case, is beyond good and evil deeds.* We are assured, of course, that he will do no wrong, that his conduct will ever be suffused by a concern for others, but should he err, should he decide in perfect detachment to refrain from all acts whatsoever, there is nothing in the

[155] *Gopala-Tapinyupanishad, Gopalottara-Tapini*, 2-15.
[156] *Chandogyopanishad*, IV. 14.3; see also 5.24.3, VIII. 6.3.
[157] *Kaushitakopanishad*, III. 1.
[158] *Mundakopanishad*, III. 1.3; also 2.2.8.

tradition to say that he should proceed in a different manner. Neither he nor his acts can be assessed and he, as we have already seen, is no longer bothered by having done something or not having done it, by having been right or wrong, just or unjust.

The fourth point is one that we have already encountered in an earlier chapter. What can be the spur to socially relevant action in a doctrine that asserts that suffering is an illusion? The basic position, as the reader will recall, is that the reality in a person is his Atman and that this Atman is not affected by suffering, misery, pain, etc. As the only entity that exists, we have been assured, just doesn't suffer, where then is the question of alleviating suffering?

> The wise one (*i.e.*, the soul, the atman, the self) is not born, nor dies,
> This one has not come from anywhere, has not become anyone.
> Unborn, constant, eternal, primeval, this one
> Is not slain when the body is slain.
> If the slayer thinks to slay,
> If the slain thinks himself slain,
> Both these understand not.
> This one slays not, nor is slain.[159]

> That Soul (Atman) is not this, it is not that (*neti, neti*). It is indestructible, for it cannot be destroyed. It is unattached, for it does not attach itself. It is unbound. It does not tremble. It is not injured.[160]

> If they should say to him: 'If within this city of Brahman is contained everything here, all beings as well as all desires, when old age overtakes it or it perishes, what is left over therefrom?' he should say: 'That does not grow old with one's old age; it is not slain with one's murder. That is the real city of Brahman. In it desires are contained. That is the Soul, free from evil, ageless, deathless, sorrowless, hungerless, thirstless, whose desire is the Real, whose conception is the Real.[161]

> This misconception known as the Universe is verily a fabrication of what is non-existent. In the one reality, which is changeless, aspectless and non-differentiated, where (is verily scope) for differentiation? In the Atman of consciousness, which is devoid of states, such as the seer, seeing and the seen, which is non-ailing, which is intensely full, as the ocean at the time of the deluge, wherein the darkness (of ignorance, which is the cause of the delusion), gets dissolved, as in the radiance (of the Sun), in the non-dual transcendent truth, that is non-differentiated, where (is the scope) for differentiation? In the transcendent truth, which is the

[159] *Kathopanishad*, 2.18, 19.
[161] *Chandogyopanishad*, VIII. 1.4.
[160] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, 4.4.22.

> absolute One, how can the disintegrating principle dwell? By whom has differentiation been seen, in the absolutely blissful sleep?[162]

The *Gita*, as is well known, reiterates this position many times over. Only the sense-contacts, declares Krishna (in verse 2.14) cause heat and cold, pleasure and pain and, "they come and go, they are impermanent"; the body, He says, isn't the real entity and "of the unreal no being there is," the real stuff is the soul and "there is no non-being of the real" (2.16); "never did I not exist," He tells Arjuna, "nor thou, nor these rulers of men; and none of us will ever hereafter cease to exist" (2.12) and that "just as in this body the embodied (Self) passes into childhood and youth and old age, so does He pass into another body . . . ." (2.13); He reminds us again and again that "none can cause the destruction of that, the Inexhaustible" (2.17), that "he slays not, nor is he slain" (2.19), that "He is not born, nor does He ever die . . . unborn, eternal, unchangeable and primeval, He is not slain when the body is slain" (2.20), that "just as a man casts off worn-out clothes and puts on others which are new, so the embodied (soul) casts off worn-out bodies and enters others which are new" (2.29), and so on.

Moreover, it isn't just that the real stuff in man is spared the ultimate, *i.e.*, death, the fact is, we are told repeatedly, that it does not suffer at all, it is, as the Upanishads and the *Gita* assert repeatedly, "immutable," "unchangeable." It does not undergo any changes of mood or state just as it does not undergo any changes of size, etc. The *Gita's* second discourse puts the matter succinctly, "Him weapons cut not, Him fire burns not, and Him water wets not, Him wind dries not. He cannot be cut, nor burnt, nor wetted, nor dried up. . ." (verses 2.23, 24).

And thus the wise do not grieve at what seems to be happening to bodies, theirs or those of others (see, for instance, the *Gita*, 2.13,25). Moreover, Krishna adds, even *if* you think that the reality in a person indeed perishes and is reborn, perishes again and is again reborn, then too there is no reason to grieve, for in that case, it is clear, "to that which is born, death is indeed certain, and to that which is dead, birth is certain. Wherefore, about the unavoidable, you ought not to grieve" (*Gita*, verses 2.26,27).

Now, if Arjuna does not need to worry about slaying individuals on the ground either that the *real* individual is not going to be affected at all or that his birth, death, etc., are inevitable in any case, then why should I be troubled if something I do (far short of slaying, in any case) seems to pain someone? If he (the real stuff in him, that is) is immune to Arjuna's sword and fire, surely he is not going to be inconvenienced by a bit of usury on my part? Why should I run around trying to help if someone (the apparent, not the real self, naturally) seems to be in anguish?

This is why the knower is not, and the aspirant is advised to try not to, be distracted or affected by the pain, suffering, etc., of others or his own. The wise man is, and the aspirant is advised to be, as a stone, to be as a blind,

[162] *Adhyatmopanishad*, 22-25.

tradition to say that he should proceed in a different manner. Neither he nor his acts can be assessed and he, as we have already seen, is no longer bothered by having done something or not having done it, by having been right or wrong, just or unjust.

The fourth point is one that we have already encountered in an earlier chapter. What can be the spur to socially relevant action in a doctrine that asserts that suffering is an illusion? The basic position, as the reader will recall, is that the reality in a person is his Atman and that this Atman is not affected by suffering, misery, pain, etc. As the only entity that exists, we have been assured, just doesn't suffer, where then is the question of alleviating suffering?

> The wise one (*i.e.*, the soul, the atman, the self) is not born, nor dies,
> This one has not come from anywhere, has not become anyone.
> Unborn, constant, eternal, primeval, this one
> Is not slain when the body is slain.
> If the slayer thinks to slay,
> If the slain thinks himself slain,
> Both these understand not.
> This one slays not, nor is slain.[159]

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[162] *Adhyatmopanishad*, 22-25.

dull-witted, deaf, dumb, mad man, to be a ghost as far as these ups and downs of the world and of the people in it are concerned.

In whom all beings
Have become just the Self of the discerner—
Then what delusion, what sorrow is there
For him who perceives the unity?[163]

The seer sees not death,
Nor sickness, nor any distress.
The seer sees only the All,
Obtains the All entirely . . . .[164]

The fruit of detachment is wisdom.
The fruit of wisdom is non-concern . . . .[165]

. . . Even as folk gathered at a fair, even though they move about (from place to place), are as much as not present, to a knower of the Brahman, because of his non attachment, even a village is like a wood. He, who has his face turned inwards, while sleeping and waking, looks upon a city, countryside or village, as a forest, during his wanderings and study. When coolness of the interior has been attained (by the knower of the Brahman), the world becomes cool (and is looked upon as the Brahman alone). In the case of those, whose interior is consumed by strong desire, the world is full of a raging forest-fire, (and) is looked upon as the real existence and not the Brahman What stands in the interior of all living creatures, that alone stands outside (as well).[166]

. . . The mind of him, (the *Jivanmukta*), who preserves his fortitude in prosperity as well as adversity, and whom (external phenomena) cannot disturb out of his equanimity, even as puffs of breath cannot a huge mountain, they (wise men) know that (mind) as practically dead. They (wise men) know that the mind of that (*Jivanmukta*) is destroyed, whom neither adversity nor niggardliness, nor zeal, nor infatuation, nor dull-wittedness, nor the height of prosperity would drive out of temper.[167]

He by whom the world is not afflicted and who is not afflicted by the world, who is free from joy, envy, fear, sorrow, he is dear to Me.[168]

Nor is this to be just the state of the knower alone. The aspirant must consciously train himself not to be affected by the suffering and privation and

[163] *Ishopanishad*, 7.
[164] *Chandogyopanishad*, 7.26.2; *Maitreyopanishad*, 7.11.6 is similar.
[165] *Adhyatmopanishad*, 23.
[166] *Anna-Purnopanishad*, I. 28-39.
[167] *Ibid.*, IV. 11-13.
[168] *Bhagavad Gita*, 12-15; many other stanzas have the same import.

pain around him. As has been noted earlier, he must immunize himself against all external stimuli (of which privation, injustice, the pain of others are but instances) because, among other reasons, these stimuli ruffle the mind and a ruffled mind is the proximate cause of bondage. That is why it is said "the state of remaining like a stone with all ideation quiescent and freed from the states of waking and sleeping, that is the supreme state of the self."[169] That is how when Maitreya describes his vision he tells us, ". . . I am devoid of the equal and the unequal . . . I am above the distinction of the good and the bad and I am devoid of ideation . . . . I am above truth and untruth, I am always nothing other than pure experience."[170] That is why the aspirant is told, "Give up righteousness and un-righteousness, give up both truth and untruth; having given up both truth and untruth discard that by which you abandon (all these) (that is, all duality)."[171] That is why in describing his mental state the aspirant states, "discarding the idea of oneself and another, taking no sides in worldly happenings and clinging to the Atman as an adamantine pillar, I am steady."[172]

"But may one not accept these propositions at an intellectual level without actually going the whole hog?" "A fool indeed," answers the *Maitreyopanishad*, "takes (theoretical) delight in Brahman without practically experiencing it (the state that he is Brahman; his doing so is) like the joy of tasting fruit found on the branch of a tree reflected (in the lake)."[173]

"But what about the *Gita*? Is Arjuna being asked to go off to the Himalayas, to give up all sense of responsibility for the state of affairs? Is he not on the contrary being asked to wage a righteous war? And is the climax of the *Gita* not his declaration, 'destroyed is my delusion and I have gained understanding through Thy Grace, O Achyuta. I am firm, with doubts gone. I will do Thy word?'[174] And then does he not go on to fight?"

As in the matter of works, in regard to a social conscience also the *Gita* represents a major step forward. What was indifference and unconcern in the Upanishads is unobtrusively transformed into equanimity in the *Gita*. This is seen best in the numerous passages in which the *Gita* urges us to transcend opposites—to be equanimous in pleasure and pain (verses 2.15, 38; 6.7, 32; 12.13-14; 15.5), in gain and loss (2.38), in success and defeat (2.38, 48; 4.22; 18.26), when faced with good and bad (2.57), love and hatred (2.64; 3.34), the pleasant and the unpleasant (5.20), on attaining the desirable and the undesirable (13.9), in cold and heat (6.7), in honour and disgrace (6.7). Being neither depressed or exultant in these states the aspirant is asked to be "of the same mind to the good-hearted, friends, foes, the indifferent, the neutral, the hateful, relatives, the righteous and the unrighteous" (6.9).

[169]*Maitreyopanishad*, 2.31. [170]*Ibid.*, 3.6, 7, 23. [171]*Sannyasopanishad*, 2.17.
[172]*Ibid.*, 2.66. Illustrative passages from just one set of Upanishads can be seen in *Jabalopanishad*, 6.1, *Turiyatitavadhutopanishad*, 1; *Narada-Parivrajakopanishad*, 3.87; 4.21, 35; 5.24-6, 50, 53; *Paramhansa-Parivrajakopanishad*, 3; *Yajnavalkyopanishad*, 6.
[173]*Maitreyopanishad*, 2.23. [174]*Bhagvad Gita*, 18.73.

As was mentioned in the matter of works, passages such as these mark a substantial advance over the Upanishads in the matter of social responsibility too and they constitute sound, practical counsel. But, in addition to the five observations that are being made in this section and which apply to the *Gita* also, two additional points have to be noted in relation to passages of the *Gita* that have been just recalled.

The first point is that in this matter, as on the question of works, the *Gita* has a bit of both points of view. Many passages do incline very heavily towards complete withdrawal, towards unconcern rather than mere equanimity. Recall just two sets of passages that have been cited earlier:

> He who is free from wants, who is pure, clever, *unconcerned, untroubled, renouncing all undertakings*, he who is (thus) devoted to Me is dear to Me.
>
> He who neither rejoices, nor hates, nor grieves, nor desires, *renouncing good and evil*, he who is full of devotion is dear to Me.
>
> He who is the same to foe and friend, and also in honour and dishonour; who is the same in cold and heat, in pleasure and pain; who is free from attachment; to whom censure and praise are equal; who is silent, content with anything, homeless, steady-minded, full of devotion; that man is dear to Me.[175]

> He to whom pain and pleasure are alike, who dwells in the Self, to whom a clod of earth and stone and gold are alike, to whom the dear and the undear are alike, who is a man of wisdom, to whom censure and praise are same.
>
> The same in honour and disgrace, the same towards friends and enemies, *abandoning all undertakings*—he is said to have crossed beyond the *guna*-s.[176]

The second point is that the ones the tradition has honoured, the ones whom it has held in the highest regard, whether these be a Ramana Maharishi or a Ramakrishna or a Shirdi-*ke*-Sai Baba, they certainly seem to have embodied not merely the equanimity of the earlier passages but the total unconcern that is implied by the latter. They have lived the ideal held out in verses such as 3.17, 18 (verses, incidentally, that figure in the discourse on *Karma-yoga*), "That man, verily, who rejoices in the Self, who is satisfied with the Self, who is content in the Self alone—*for him there is nothing to do*. For him, *there is here no interest whatever in what is done or what is not done*. . ."; or that held out in verse 6.3, "for a devotee who wishes to attain *yoga*, action is said to be the means. For the same (devotee), when he has attained *yoga*, *quiescence is said to be the means*"; or that held out in verse 2.50, "He who is imbued with wisdom *casts off here both good deeds and bad deeds*. . .," or that in 5.13, "*renouncing all actions* by thought and self-

[175] *Bhagavad Gita*, XII. 16-19.

[176] *Ibid.*, XIV. 24-25.

controlled, the embodied one rests happily in the nine-gated city, *neither at all acting nor causing to act*"; or verse 15.20, ". . .on knowing this (a man) becomes wise, O Bharata, and *all his duties are accomplished.*"

It does seem, does it not, that such efforts that the *Gita's* author made to endow our *jnanin*-s with a social conscience, seem to have ended where they began, that is, in a book? Is it the picture of Arjuna in battle that seems to have inspired our Ramana Maharishis and our Ramakrishnas and our Shirdi-*ke*-Sai Babas or is it the picture of the *Jivanmukta*-s and the *videha mukta*-s given in the following representative passages from three Upanishads?

> He, unto whom enjoyments offer no temptations, even without the operation of extraneous influences, such as penance and like, the is said to be a *Jivanmukta*. He, who is indifferent to happiness and misery as they occur (as pre-ordained) and does not exult (over such happiness), nor feel depressed (over such misery) is said to be a *Jivanmukta*. He, who is not inwardly touched by exhibitions of joy, jealousy, fright, anger, greed and niggardliness is said to be a *Jivanmukta*. . . . He, in whose inward vision, there are no likes and dislikes, and who conducts himself as if in a state of sleep, is said to be a *Jivanmukta*. . . . He who, devoid of attachment to all things, behaves very much like a passive witness and remains unexpectant of the fruit of his actions, is said to be a *Jivanmukta*. He, by whom have been given up righteous as well as unrighteous conduct, reflection as well as diligent application of the mind and everything connected with the functioning of the inner senses, is said to be a *Jivanmukta*. . . . He, by whom has been completely given up even the thought of righteous and unrighteous conduct, pleasure and pain, as also of death and birth, is said to be a *Jivanmukta*. He, who is devoid of either sorrow or exultation, is possessed of a balanced and clear frame of mind and does not grieve, nor gloat over anything, is said to be a *Jivanmukta*. He, by whom all desires, all doubts, all efforts, and all convictions, (relating to things apart from the Brahman), have been voluntarily abandoned, is said to be a *Jivanmukta*. He, whose mind is balanced at the coming into being, sustenance and destruction (of things pertaining to him), as well as at their rise and fall, is said to be a *Jivanmukta*. He, who neither hates anything, nor desires, likewise, to attain anything and who enjoys pleasures that fall to his lot, in the usual course, is known as *Jivanmukta*. . . .[177]

> Whatever sorrows, whatever unquenchable desires and whatever forms of anguish (there may be in this world), all that stands dissolved in persons with a tranquillized mind, (with all its functions abated), even as darkness stands dissolved in the rays of the effulgent *Arka*-s (suns). . . .[178]

> Giving up being addicted to what is apart from the Atman, unaffected by

[177] *Mahopanishad*, II. 42-62. [178] *Ibid.*, IV. 29.

the condition of the phenomenal world, (even if it should meet with destruction), do thou become intent on the absolute innermost perception, (the Brahman), with a singleness of purpose. . . .[179]

He, in whose inward functionings and outward dealings there are no desires to be gratified, nor aversions to be loathed, and who, though wide awake, conducts himself as if asleep, is said to be a *Jivanmukta*. He, who neither exults in, nor feels depressed by considerations of joy, jealousy, fear, anger, lust and niggardliness, without drawing any inferences relating to them, either based on analogy or on actual experience, (is a *Jivanmukta*). . . .[180]

In whom, even the distinctive functions associated with the excellent qualities indicative (of a *Jivanmukta*), are found to have met with their dissolution, such a one, of a digitless (indivisible) character, becomes a *Videha-mukta*. In that flawless and exquisitely sacred state of *Videhamukti*, in that form (of the mind) characterized by the cessation of all functioning; which falls within the range of *Videhamukti*, and is known as the formless dissolution of the mind, there is nothing whatsoever therein, (of distinctive or indistinctive character). Neither attributes, nor the absence of attributes, are there therein; neither worldly excellence, nor the opposite of such excellence, nor worldliness; nor exultation, nor dejection, nor the emotions of joy and jealousy; neither radiance, nor darkness, to the slightest extent; neither the twilights and the like, nor the nights (long or short); neither existence, nor non-existence, nor the state (intermediate) between the two. . . .[181]

Men of full intellect. . .neither take delight in, nor censure anything. To them life and death are alike.[182]

At worst the aspirant is allowed to pretend an interest in the world and its trials:

Resting upon the foremost perception (of the Brahman) which manifests itself as the renunciation *par excellence* (attained through *Vikshepa*) and fit to be meditated upon (in *Samadhi*), devoid of distress and feeling quite at ease, (in thine own element), do thou wander over the face of the earth, as a *Jivanmukta*. With an interior devoid of all desires, with all passions cast off, *sans Vasana*-s *ostensibly conducting thyself as interested in all things about thee*, do thou wander over the face of the earth, devoid of distress. Keeping a *show of interest* in wordly affairs, (even as the proverbial statuette in a temple-tower does of lifting the tower), but really devoid of agitation at heart, *ostensibly* a man of action, but really devoid

[179] *Ibid.*, IV. 83-87.
[180] *Ibid.*, VI. 46-50.
[181] *Anna-Purnopanishad*, IV. 19-25.
[182] *Ibid.*, V. 14-24.

> of the inclination to act, do thou wander over the face of the earth with a pure heart. . . . With a large heart and winning manners, acting in all the affairs of the world in accordance with the time-hallowed rules of conduct laid down by the ancestors, inwardly eschewing attachment to worldly affairs, but acting outwardly, as if very much attached to the ways of the world, (very much like a clever actor on the stage, putting on a garb not very much to his liking and dissembling his natural expression) inwardly imbued with the spirit of detachment, but to all appearances tending with effort towards the gratification of desires, (in short, acting purely with a view to setting an example to the world at large), (do thou wander over the face of the earth with a pure mind). . . . Bondage arises from the responsivity of the sentient principle of the mind to external stimuli, (in other words, from ideations). With their cessation there is said to be liberation. The Atman is the non-responsive state of the supreme sentience. . . .[183]

But in actual fact one must root out even this pretence from one's psyche:

> Non concern is of a two-fold character. Listen to this, its differentiation. This non-concern is of two kinds: ordinary and extraordinary. The non-clinging to things in the attitude, 'I am not the doer, nor the enjoyer, nor the person liable, nor the person affecting others', is known as ordinary non-concern. 'All (the consequences) brought about by one's past *karma* or what should be attributed to *Ishvara* alone, whether they are characterized by pleasure or pain, in neither of them is there anything of my making, by any means. Enjoyments and non-enjoyments are verily a great disease. Prosperity and affluence (are) adversity and ruin. All kinds of attachment and concern are only (the precursors of) separation. Anguish and anxiety are but the diseases of the mind. Time is ever engaged in grasping with no consideration (all states of existence and making them pass away)'. The abstinence from harbouring internally such ideas in the mind, (by the seeker) who has understood the import of the precept (of the Veda or the *guru*), is what is known as ordinary non-concern. Keeping far away (from the mind), the pondering over the meaning of the words, 'I am not the doer. *Ishvara* (alone) is the doer. Surely, this is (the result of) my past *karma*,' that silence (non-response by the senses to the external stimuli of objects of pleasure), that posture (of remaining in the form of the innermost Atman), and that quiescence (the non-remembrance of being beside the Brahman) is what is known as extraordinary non-concern. . . .[184]

These images rather than the image of Arjuna on the battlefield have inspired the ones we have come to honour. And is the frame of mind describ-

[183] *Mahopanishad*, VI. 66-82. [184] *Aksy-Upanishad*, 20-26.

ed in these accounts the frame of mind of a person who will be spurred to socially relevant acts by a sense of social responsibility?

The fifth point that militates against a social conscience is the matter of authorship, of responsibility for the state of affairs. We have to distinguish three notions, notions that are not altogether consistent with one another, but each of which is assiduously asserted by the tradition. In each case the effect is the same: to justify inaction, to talk away any residual notions that one might have of joining others to rectify the state of affairs, to end privation and injustice. I shall enumerate the three notions, point to their consequences and then show how two of these notions send even our rationalizers into doing one somersault after another.

The three notions are as follows: first, all that happens takes place by His will, He is the only creative agent; in particular, and this is the second notion, *I*, the essential one, that is my Self, is not an agent, it has not done anything, for instance, to help create or perpetuate the present state of affairs by which many are ground to smithereens; third, the sole creative agent, the Absolute, is just, He dispenses rewards according to a person's deeds, He does all in accordance with the inexorable law, *Rita*, so if some seem to suffer, the suffering is but their due. (Why they should suffer when, as the second notion would have it, they are not the agents of whatever deeds may have happened from their hands is, of course, not to be inquired into.)

The first point to remember then is that He is the only creative agent.

"After Him, as He shines, doth everything shine," says the *Mundakopanishad*, "This whole world is illumined by His light."[185] "From fear of Him," says that *Kathopanishad* spelling out the *modus operandi*, "from fear of Him fire doth burn. From fear the sun gives forth heat. From fear both Indra and Wind, and death, as the fifth, do speed along."[186] "Verily, O Gargi," the great sage says in the *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, "at the command of that Imperishable the sun and the moon. . .the earth and the sky. . .the moments, the hours, the days, the nights, the fortnights, the months, the seasons, and the years stand apart. Verily, O Gargi, at the command of that Imperishable some rivers flow from the snowy mountains to the east, others to the west, in whatever direction each flows. . . ."[187] The *Gita* echoes this notion—of the Absolute being the sole Author—in verse after verse. It is He whose light resides in the sun, moon and fire and thus illumines all the worlds, it is the energy that supports and upholds all beings, it is He who nourishes all herbs, it is He who residing in each of us as the *Vaishvanara* fire digests the fourfold food, it is from Him that memory, knowledge, as well as their loss proceeds, it is He who is the author of the Vedanta.[188] He is the implement, the agent, the deed, the

[185] *Mundakopanishad*, 2.2.10; *Kathopanishad*, 5.15, *Shvetashvataropanishad*, 6.14 are similar.

[186] *Kathopanishad*, 6.3; *Taittiriyopanishad*, 2.8.1 is similar.

[187] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, 3.8.9.

father, the mother, the sustainer, the witness, the goal. He is the one who gives heat, the one who gives and holds back rain, etc.[189]

But He does not author merely these natural and biological functions. In particular, He is the one who places men where they are. He is the one who lays out the relationships, the empirical order in which we find ourselves. Krishna tells us that He is the author of the caste-system, that He is "the splendour of the splendid," He tells us that "whatever being is glorious, prosperous or strong, that know thou to be a manifestation of a part of My splendour."[190] (Next time you cavil at the splendour of your landlord or your ruler remember that you cavil not just at the Order He has Himself created but at *His* own splendour.)

He authors natural phenomena. He authors the social order. But He does more. As our Internal Ruler. He orders and authors whatever we do as individuals, our deeds, our desires, our very thoughts. "He who dwelling in the breath," says the great sage Yajnavalkya, "yet is other than the breath, whom the breath does not know, whose body the breath is, who controls the breath from within, He is your soul, the Inner Controller, the Immortal."[191] And the same goes for your speech, sight, hearing, your sense of touch, your understanding, your mind.[192] "In the space within the heart lies the ruler of all, the lord of all, the king of all. . . This is that great, unborn soul, who eats the food (which people eat), the giver of good. . . . This very one is the ruler of everything, is the lord of everything, governs this whole universe, whatever there is."[193]

He is the one who, for instance, creates desires in us; the *Kathopanishad* speaks of Him as "He who is awake in those that sleep, the person who fashions desire after desire. . . ."[194] (Those are the desires, remember, that lead progressively to perdition. So he creates what leads to perdition!)

In particular, He is the one who determines what good and what evil acts each of us shall do: "This one, truly, indeed," declares the *Kaushitakepanishad*, "causes him whom He wishes to lead up from these worlds, to perform good action. This one, also, indeed, causes him whom He wishes to lead downward, to perform bad action. . . ."[195]

Or as Krishna tells Arjuna in the last discourse of the *Gita*, "The Lord dwells in the hearts of all beings, O Arjuna, whirling by Maya all beings (as if) mounted on a machine."[196]

Remember that it is precisely this notion—the notion that He is the sole Author of whatever happens—that the people internalized, this is what they came to believe. We have Shankara himself testifying to this fact: ". . .It is well known that Indra is the presiding deity of strength," he says while commenting on *Brahma-Sutra*, 1.1.29, '*for even ordinary people assert,*

[189] *Ibid.*, 9.16-19.
[190] *Ibid.*, 4.13, 10.36, 41.
[191] *Brihad Aranyakopanishad*, 3.7.16.
[192] *Ibid.*, 3.7. 17-23.
[193] *Ibid.*, 4.4.22-4; 5.6.1.
[194] *Kathopanishad*, 5.8.
[195] *Kaushitakepanishad*, 3.8.
[196] *Bhagvad Gita*, 18.61.

"Energies," it says, "act upon energies,"[205] it is not the Self but nature that acts,[206] and so, "he sees," it says, "who sees all actions being performed by nature alone, the Self not acting";[207] "actions," it repeats, "are wrought in all cases by the energies of nature. He whose mind is deluded thinks, 'I am the doer'."[208]

Even in the limited sense of being an instrument of the Lord's will, *I* (really speaking, the *non-I*, that is, my body, senses, etc.) am helpless and am only doing what has been ordained. "Resorting to My *Prakriti*," says Krishna, "I again and again send forth the whole multitude of beings, powerless under the control of *Prakriti*."[209] "Even the man of knowledge acts in conformity with his own nature; (all) beings follow (their) nature. . . ."[210] Therefore, in the end Krishna warns Arjuna, "Bound as thou art, O son of Kunti, by thy own nature-born act, that which from delusion thou likest not to do, thou shalt do, though against thy will."[211]

Thus, the Absolute is the sole agent, my essential Self is not. To the extent that things get done by the non-me (the flesh and blood me, so to say) that entity is completely constrained to act the way it does.

Now comes the third notion: The Absolute who is the sole creative agent is not capricious. He apportions rewards, *guna*-s, natures, according to one's deeds. Thus, all that happens has a rationale, it happens in accordance with the inexorable law, *Rita*, each is living out his *karma*.

"From Him are the fruits of action," says *Brahma-Sutra*, 3 2.38, "for that is reasonable." The *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad* speaks of Him as "the bestower of food all round and the giver of wealth,"[212] the *Gita* speaks of Him as "the dispenser."[213] That rewards are apportioned according to acts is stated in various ways in the *Gita*, for instance. "Howsoever men approach Me," says Krishna, "even so do I reward them. . .";[214] their subsequent life is made to depend on what they consecrate themselves to: ' votaries of the Gods go to the Gods; to the *Pitris* go the votaries of *Pitri*-s; to the *Bhutas* go the worshippers of *Bhuta*-s; My worshippers come to Myself. . .;"[215] similarly while creating castes Krishna says He acts "according to the distribution of *guna*-s and deeds,"[216] that He apportions the duties of the different castes "according to the qualities born of nature"[217] and these follow from one's deeds.

The practical inference is that if anyone is in pain, if he is poor and diseased and hungry, he deserves all of it. For the Lord Himself has ordained his lot and He ordains justly. If someone falls prey to any exploitation and

[205] *Ibid.*, 3.28. [206] *Ibid.*, 5.14. [207] *Ibid.*, 13.29.
[208] *Ibid.*, 3.27. [209] *Ibid.*, 9.8. [210] *Ibid*, 3.33.
[211] *Ibid.*, 18.60. The *Gita* has other variations of this theme also. In one variant (14.19, 23; 18.40) the *guna*-s are agents; but then it turns out that the *guna*-s are born of nature (14.3, 5; 18.41–4); and the same Absolute is, as before, the Lord of Nature (9.10). In another variant a man acts according to his faith (17.3) but his faith is according to his nature (17.2-3). And so on.
[212] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, 4.4.22. [213] *Bhagvad Gita*, 9.16-19.
[214] *Ibid.*, 4.11. [215] *Ibid.*, 9.25. [216] *Ibid.*, 4.13. [217] *Ibid.*, 18.41.

extortion, that is just his ordained lot. *I* am not responsible. *I* am merely an instrument (if we believe Krishna's warning in 18.60 that was just cited, even an unwilling instrument) of His determination. When Krishna shows Arjuna His universal form, is this not what Arjuna sees, that the ones he, Arjuna, is hesitating to slay have already been slain by the Lord?

> And all the sons of Dhritarashtra, with hosts of princes, Bhishma, Drona and that son (Karna) of a charioteer, with the warrior chiefs of ours, enter hurrying into Thy mouth, terrible with tusks and fearful to behold. Some are found sticking in the gaps betwixt the teeth with their heads crushed to powder.
>
> As many torrents of rivers flow direct towards the sea, so do these heroes in the world of men enter Thy flaming mouths.
>
> As moths hurriedly rush into a blazing fire for destruction, just so do these creatures also hurriedly rush into Thy mouths for destruction.
>
> Thou lickest up devouring all worlds on every side with Thy flaming mouths, filling the whole world with flames. Thy fierce rays are blazing forth, O Vishnu.
>
> Tell me who thou art, so fierce in form. I bow to Thee, O God Supreme; have mercy. I desire to know Thee, the Original Being. I know not indeed Thy doing.
>
> The Blessed Lord said:
>
> 'I am the mighty world-destroying Time, now engaged in destroying worlds. Even without thee, none of the warriors arrayed in hostile armies shalt live.
>
> Therefore, do thou arise and obtain fame. Conquer the enemies and the enjoy the unrivalled dominion. By Myself have they been already slain; be thou a mere instrument, O Savyasachin'.[218]

As the Lord has Himself put the wretched where they are, and as He has done so after due deliberation, after taking account of what they deserve by their own deeds, as He has done so in perfect detachment out of sense of pure justice, why should *I* fret and fume about their condition, how am I responsible for their lot? Indeed, what seems to *me* to be suffering inflicted on hapless individuals may itself be a boon, it probably is the precise thing that will cleanse them and fit them for a brighter future. The Lord's seeming cruelty is in fact His compassion, explains Ramanuja. The Lord does not want these wretched beings to continue to transgress His laws and thus go on increasing their negative balance on the *Karma*-ledger. That is why He now inflicts exemplary suffering on them as a deterrent. Were He to shirk from this He would only end up *increasing* the cumulative amount of their suffering over the aeons; besides, He would not be acting like a man:

> When pity has the effect of bringing about the transgression of law on

[218] *Bhagvad Gita*, XI. 26-33.

> the part of the (pitied) person, it is no way to the credit (of the pitying person); it rather implies the charge of unmanliness (weakness) and it is creditable to control and subdue it. For otherwise it would follow that to subdue and chastise one's enemies is something to be blamed. What the Lord Himself aims at is ever to increase happiness to the highest degree, and to this end it is instrumental that He should reprove and reject the infinite and intolerable mass of sins which accumulates in the course of beginning and endless aeons and thus check the tendency of individual beings to transgress the laws.[219]

As the good Lord is Himself prescribing suffering and that too solely as a means of decreasing the total amount of suffering over time, why should *I* come in His way, why should *I* hamper His work, why should *I* alleviate the suffering of this wretched fellow, thereby retard the corrective process and actually end up increasing his total suffering over time?[220]

The reader would have noticed that the three notions—that the Absolute is the sole creative agent, that my Self is not, that He rewards me according to my acts—are not consistent. The first and third do not sit well together (as *He* is the only creative agent how come *I* am made to suffer for what *He* has done?), nor do the second and third (in the second I am said *not* to be the agent, in the third I *am* said to have brought my condition upon myself by my own deeds).

And yet the tradition affirms each of them. Why? Simply because it needs all the three of them.

The first and third together are an excellent rationalization for the empirical order. Together they tell us that it has been authored by the Absolute Himself and that He has authored it in a just manner keeping in mind what each constituent deserves. The second and third together are excellent balm for the rich: we, not being the creative agents, are not responsible for the state of affairs, the poor deserve what they have got. And the three together are potent opium for the poor: our oppressors deserve to be where they are—on our heads, we deserve to be where we are—under their heels; the order is not only just but powerful, even inexorable, having been authored by the Absolute Himself, we can only mark our time, worshipping Him, as the *Gita* (18.46, 47) counsels, by doing our bounden duty (and what is our 'bounden duty,' pray? "The duty to which one is born," says the *Gita* [18.48]); the order is just, even humane and merciful (the present suffering being only a way to keep us from future transgressions that would entail even greater suffering); *we* are the ones who

[219] *Vedanta-Sutras with the Commentary of Ramanuja, op. cit.*, pp. 488-489.

[220] Ramanuja does not, of course, explain why the omnipotent Absolute has to adopt this circuitous route for correcting our conduct! Why does He not set us right straightaway? After all, we are directly under His command. He is all-powerful as well as omniscient, why does He not re-programme us directly? Why employ suffering as an instrument?

are to blame, *we* are the ones who should try to understand the hidden purpose of the suffering that we are being put to, *we* are the ones who must understand the mysterious justice in the way our affairs have been ordered; the suffering only *seems* unbearable; things only *seem* as bad as they can be, they aren't really; if they were, if they had really become unjust, the Lord Himself would have come down to set them right; has He not assured all, "Whenever there is a decay of religion, O Bharata, whenever irreligion increases, then I manifest Myself. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of evil-doers, for the firm establishment of religion, I am born in every age";[221] so, if He *hasn't* come then things couldn't really be as unjust as they seem; if *He has* come and we still continue to suffer then it must be that we are not the ones who are good and virtuous, that instead *we* are the evil-doers for punishing and destroying whom the Lord has come.

THE BASIC DEFICIENCY

We have thus far reviewed five reasons on account of which the Upanishadic propositions from which ethics are derived are an inadequate foundation for ethics. These five reasons are, first, the assurance that the baneful effects of transgressions can be overcome in various and very easy ways; second, the fact, as attested over and over again, that knowledge of the Sovereign Secret elevates one to a supra-ethical state; third, the assurance that so long as what I do is done with perfect detachment, I incur no sin, a proposition that is, as we saw, as much a licence for evil as it is an argument for doing good; fourth, the assertion that suffering is really just an illusion; and finally, the three propositions that together shift responsibility from the beneficiaries of an empirical order, the oppressors, to the oppressed and to the Absolute.

But the basic flaw, the one that dwarfs all the others, lies in the fundamental proposition that is the fount of all other ethical propositions in the tradition, the very assertions that our hagiographers flaunt so much, "*Tat Tvam Asi,*" "*Aham Brahmasmi*", etc —propositions which affirm that one soul is the same as another, that all of them are Brahman. Our hagiographers maintain that these propositions are *the* one foundation for ethical conduct that one needs; in their reckoning these propositions inform us that as all are intrinsically One, we should treat all alike, that we should treat each human as Brahman.

But what are the entities that are being equated here? One set of abstractions—the Atmans— is being equated with another abstraction—Brahman. Human beings as we know them, individuals of flesh and blood, of joy and sorrow continue to be derided, even denied.

This schism—of equating disembodied abstractions alone—is best reflected in the practice of the great seers who are said on all hands to have got as far in internalizing the Upanishadic doctrine, "*Tat Tvam Asi*" and all, as

[221] *Bhagvad Gita*, 4.7, 8.

one can possibly get. They will proclaim this equality, indeed identity, of abstractions, they will even on occasion express some laudable sentiments —that the Brahmin is one who knows the Brahman, not one who is born into the household of a Brahmin, not one who observes prescribed rituals, etc.,[222] that the divisions based on birth are a mere convention having their origins in everyday transactions,[223] that Brahman does not differentiate between *Chandals* and others,[224]—and yet in the next breath the same seers will club the same *Chandals* with dogs and swine:

> Accordingly, those who are of pleasant conduct here—the prospect is, indeed, that they will enter a pleasant womb, either the womb of a Brahman, or the womb of a Kshatriya, or the womb of a Vaishya. But those who are of stinking conduct here—the prospect is, indeed, that they will enter a stinking womb, either the womb of a dog, or the womb of a swine, or the womb of an outcast (*Chandal*) . . .[225]

They will proclaim "*vasudhaiva kutumbakam*" in one breath and in the next send up the following prayer (this one being from the beginning of the *Atharva-veda*), "O deity destroy my enemy by piercing his body all over—specially by piercing his heart, separating veins and arteries, breaking up his skull all round. Let my enemy thus be disintegrated in three ways. . . ." They will insist in one breath that each being is his Atman alone, that all Atmans are Brahman and in the next insist that if the prescribed *Mantra* is so much as heard by the lower castes it loses its efficacy,[226] that the toilers, the *Shudra*-s are "burial grounds," "walking crematoria."[227] They will proclaim in one breath that there is only one knowledge that is worth having and that in this knowledge "all is Brahman" and in the next they will debar a large part of their fellow men from that knowledge, they will insist that the texts should not be recited in the hearing or even in the sight of a *Shudra*, that they should not be recited if the *Shudra*—or a corpse—is so much as in the village,[228] that should a *Shudra* so much as listen to the texts his ears should be filled with molten lac or tin, that should he recite them his tongue should be cut out, that should he commit them to memory his body should be split in twain.[229] And the great *advaitin* Shankaracharya, realizing no doubt that all is Brahman, reproduces all this with much vehemence as does the one who disagrees with him on almost everything else, Ramanuja.[230]

[222] *Vajrasucikopanishad*, 1-9.
[223] *Nir-Alambopanishad*, 10.
[224] *Varashopanishad*. III, 14-19.
[225] *Chandogyopanishad*, 5.10.7.
[226] *Darshanopanishad*, 2.16.
[227] *Apastambha*, 1.3.9.9; *Vashishtha*, 18.12,13.
[228] *Manu*, 3.156, 161; 4.80, 81, 99; *Apastambha*, 1.3.9.9; *Gautama*, 16.5, 19; *Vashishtha*, 18.12-15; *Baudayana*, 1.2.15.
[229] *Gautama*, 12.4-6.
[230] *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya*, op. cit., pp. 229-234, and *Vedanta-Sutras with Commentary by Ramanuja*, op. cit., pp. 337-47. Anyone who thinks that *Shudras* can be taken to have been entitled to studying the Upanishads because, for

In one breath they will proclaim all creation to be equally permeated by the Absolute, to be equally a reflection of His creative power and in the next they will condemn well over half the human beings they know—women as well as the two lower castes—to have been born of "the womb of sin":

> For finding refuge in Me, even those who are born of the womb of sin, women, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras* too, reach the Supreme Goal. . . .[231]

and in the third breath they will prescribe an elaborate ritual, a *Bhasmasnana*, should one so much as "come into contact with a woman, an eunuch, an eagle, a cat, a crane, a mouse and others of that kind, by way of expiating the sin. . . ."[232]

Is it surprising then that in this tradition realization of the Self degenerates into mere self-attachment, that the call to look inwards degenerates into narcissist self-attention, that detachment degenerates into callousness, that compassion becomes the self-congratulatory pity of the rich, that *Rita* degenerates into determinism and that in turn into fatalism, that in it devotion to a fantastic god should be honoured rather than service to man?

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instance, of an allusion to "a Shudra," Jnanashruti, being instructed by the sage Raikva in *Chandogyopanishad*. 4.2.3, such a person should read *Brahma-Sutras* 1.3.34-38 as well as the comments of Shankara and Ramanuja on them

[231] *Bhagvad Gita*, 9.32.

[232] *Brahajjabalopanishad*, 4.8-10.

8

BOXES: EMPTY AND BLACK

The Upanishads, the Upanishads themselves tell us and so, of course, do the hagiographers, enshrine "a profound secret." This secret is their doctrine about the nature of reality. Whether their view about reality is valid or not, there can be little doubt that in addition to the "profound secret" the Upanishads contain much else that cannot be characterized as "profound." They contain many contradictions, many concepts that are just empty boxes, boxes into which meanings are stuffed according to the convenience of the moment, and many others that are just "black boxes," concepts that are said to "explain" what is going on but when one searches out their substantive content one draws a complete blank.

In this chapter and the next I hope to acquaint the reader with this unsatisfactory state of affairs and then show how the efforts to paper over these contradictions and to stuff meaning into these hollow concepts lays the groundwork for fideism, for replacing knowledge and enquiry by blind faith.

TAUTOLOGIES

Some of the central concepts of the doctrine—*Karma, Maya, Rita*—are just tautologies.

You can comb the Upanishads, the *Brahma-Sutra-s*, the *Gita* for the meaning of *Karma*, for instance, and you will not get beyond the following circularity: What is "*Karma*?" you ask, and the answer is: "It is that which explains your present state." "But what explains my present state?," you persist; only to be told, "It is your *Karma*."

Concepts such as these are, as Popper would say, non-falsifiable. They have no empirical, verifiable content. *Karma*, for instance, is put completely beyond the reach of empirical verification by two ancillary notions that are invariably tagged on to it. First, we are told that my present state is accounted for not just by the *Karma*-balance I have accumulated in this lifespan (which, let us assume for the sake of argument, is something that can be verified) but by the balance that I have piled up in all my past incarnations too; the latter surely is an unknowable Swiss account if ever there was one! Second, we are told that whether I shall be benefitted by a good deed or not depends not just on that deed but on whether its beneficial effect is or is not outweighed by other deeds that I have performed in the past, am performing now or may perform in the future.

To cite just one example of the latter notion, consider *Sutra* 3.4.51 from among the *Brahma-Sutra*-s. In answering the question whether knowledge can dawn in this life-time or not it says (I am using Gambhirananda's paraphrase), "The generation of knowledge takes place even in this life *if there is no obstruction to the means adopted*, for this is what is revealed (by the Upanishads)." Both Shankara and Ramanuja accept this position and their commentaries on the *Sutra* are a mere restatement of the *Sutra* in different words. Thus, for instance, Ramanuja dealing specifically with meditation say that "meditation, the result of which is worldly exaltation, springs up immediately after the works to which it is due, *in case of there being no other works of greater strength obstructing the rise of knowledge*; but if there is an obstruction of the latter kind, knowledge springs up later only . . . ."[1]

As we are on this matter we might as well anticipate the discussion a bit and notice how treacherous the texts are. On Shankara's reading the next *Sutra* (3.4.52) is paraphrased as follows, "There is no rule of this kind with regard to the result called liberation, because that state has been definitely determined (to be the same). . . . Shankara's commentary on this *Sutra*, therefore, reaffirms that once knowledge dawns, liberation is sure to follow. Ramanuja, on the other hand, takes the *Sutra* to be dealing not with whether or not liberation is sure to follow knowledge but whether it is sure to follow *instantaneously* or not. He transcribes the *Sutra* as continuing in the strain of the preceding *Sutra*: "In the same way there is non determination with regard to what has release for its result; that condition being ascertained. . . ." And, therefore, he takes the *Sutra* to affirm that liberation follows knowledge upon "the same condition, (*viz.* the termination of the obstruction presented by other works) being ascertained." He thus concludes that "even in the case of one knowing Brahman there may exist previous evil deeds of overpowering strength" which may delay his release.[2]

Fortified by these two ancillary notions, *Karma* can now explain every incongruity that we may want explained. Do the manifestly good, the hard-working, the honest, those who are engaged in serving others, suffer? The accumulated *Karma*-balance of their past lives must be negative. But what of the good deeds they are doing now? What of them? Their beneficial effects are outweighed by "previous evil deeds of overpowering strength," that's all. But how do we know that any of this is true? "Surely, if that were not the case," we are reassured, "they would not suffer as they do."

Concepts such as *Rita* and *Maya* are no different. What is *Rita*? It is what accounts for order in the universe. What accounts for order in the universe? It is *Rita*. Why do we see dual? Because of *Maya*. What is *Maya*? It is that which causes us to see dual.

It should by now be clear that the sequence in which these concepts

[1]*Vedanta-Sutras with Ramanuja's Commentary*, G. Thibaut (ed.), *Sacred Books of the East*, Max Mueller (ed.), Motilal Banarsidas, 1971, reprint, p. 713.

[2]*Ibid.*, 713-714.

evolved was not that these laws or phenomena or entities—*Karma*, *Maya*, *Rita* and the like—were actually observed in action and then the observer recorded their existence and operation for us. What happened was that some empirical phenomena—whether these be the orderliness of the stars or the privations of the good and hardworking—could not be explained away, and so black boxes were invented to "explain" them. These boxes, as is their wont, then acquired lives of their own and came—Frankenstein-like—to actually dominate the collective psyche of the community.

As crucial concepts turn out to be devoid of meaning, often "proofs" too turn out to be tautologies.

How come the world is a phantom? Consider some of the "proofs" that are offered by the Upanishads:

> Even as there is light only so long as there is the lamp (that gives the light), even as there is broad day-light only so long as the sun shines in the firmament, even as there is the delightful fragrance of the flower only so long as there is the fully-blossomed flower, even so, so long as the supreme sentience of the Brahman prevails, so long this phenomenal world of ours remains with the supreme sentience of the Brahman alone as its mainstay. (Hence do thou arrive at the conclusion that the peerless Brahman alone prevails, throwing into that background all phenomena, known and unknown, that are apart from it.) This phenomenal world exists only in the form of an illusion, but, from the point of view of the highest truth, it ceases to exist, with the attainment of the clear vision of the eye of knowledge, and the dawning of the right awakening on the vast horizon of the pure mind of the seeker. *As the phenomenal world thus turns out to be after all a phantom*, the substratum on which it is superimposed, *viz.*, the Brahman, proves to be the one peerless existence alone . . .[3]

> What is known in everyday life as the *Vishva*, is but a mere reflection and on that account cannot be looked upon as an exclusive existence apart from it (the Atman). Even this diversity of the world is a result of the manifestation (of the Atman). This (Atman), which penetrates all things, is apparently related to all things, (should their reality be conceded). In reality, however, it does not do so, as there is no place of resort (for the Atman), apart from itself. (While there is room for thinking that) the Atman is non-existent, due to the absence of any place of shelter (it could seek), *it certainly exists, for the reason that it is of the form of existence*, of something that is neither radiance nor darkness, neither capable of being adequately described nor capable of being distinctly seen and which is sedate and yet majestic, that is of the form of absolute sentience and bliss . . .[4]

[3] *Mahopanishad*, V. 107-118. [4] *Ibid.*, II. 1-11.

This misconception known as the Universe is verily a fabrication of what is non existent. In the one reality, which is changeless, aspectless and non-differentiated, where (is verily scope) for differentiation? In the Atman of consciousness, which is devoid of states, such as of the seer, seeing and the seen, which is non ailing, which is intensely full, as the ocean at the time of the Deluge, wherein the darkness (of ignorance, which is the cause of delusion), gets dissolved as in the radiance (of the Sun), int he non-dual transcendent truth, that is non-differentiated, where (is the scope) for differentiation? In the transcendent truth which is the absolute one, how can the disintegrating principle dwell? By whom has differentiation been seen, in the absolutely blissful sleep . . .[5]

When faith in the non-duality has been confirmed and the misconception about the duality extinguished, seekers see, as in a dream, the world which meets with dissolution, such as of the broken pieces of the autumnal cloud. Then there will remain but the Supreme Existence (the Brahman), O Nidagha, be convinced about that. . . .[6]

For the reason that all this phenomenal existence (which is apart from the Atman), is nought, for that very reason this Atman is verily non-dual (without a second), that being one alone, wherein all phenomenal existence has its dissolution (because of the absence of differentiation between the Atman and phenomenal existence, both being of the character of generic existence). Should it be contended that there appears to be difference, (the answer is), it is not so, for the reason that such difference is non-existent. For the difference is verily due to the change in the basis of knowledge and not in the underlying real existence, (which is change-less and infinite) while the difference is verily non-existence, it being of the character of unreality. . . . Questioned by the gods as to how this non-differentiated *Turya* of the form of eternal existence, sentience and bliss, can be described as the *Pranava* of the character of the *Ardhamatra* which is only transient, Prajapati answered with the monosyllable, 'Om', alone (adding, 'What is expressed by human beings in words and visualized by the mind as the *Turyomkara* is the indivisible one essence of existence, sentience and bliss in its non-differentiated aspect. There is hence no in-consistency in the position assumed). The *Omkara* constituted of syllables and sounds is certainly not of the *Turya*, which is formless, nameless, actionless, soundless, and is hence indescribable. Speech which is of the form of syllables and sounds, that alone constitutes the *Omkara*, the *Turya-pranava*. All this phenomenal existence iss peech alone. There is nothing in this phenomenal existence, being any form or displaying any activity of a character, resembling absence of sound (*i.e.*, silence), res-embling only a name without significance. Speech is sound alone and sound rouses sentience alone. Hence this *Omkara*, which is of the form

[5] *Adhyatmopanishad*, 22-25.

[6] *Varahopanishad*, IV, 2-11-17

of sound, is of the form of sentience, and is hence full of sentience. All this phenomenal existence is full of sentience. Even as there could be no pot without the clay which goes to make it,even so, there can be no phenomenal existence without the sentience that goes to make it. For this reason, the *Parameshvara*, the Supreme Lord, the *Paramatman*, *Nrisimha* alone is the *Turya* and there is nought else apart from that. . . .[7]

(The *Paramatman*) that is eternal, that embraces all, that is verily the Atman, the *Kutastha* (that is immovable, unchangeable and perpetually the same), that is devoid of defects and is one only, is split (into parts) out of the delusion caused by *Maya* and not out of his real form. Hence there prevails the non-dual existence alone and not the phenomenal world, nor the ever-recurring course of worldly existence. . . .[8]

All this phenomenal existence is verily absolute existence alone, (there being no other existence, so far as could be seen, apart from the absolute existence). For the reason that this phenomenal world was of the one character of existence, even before its creation, as existence cannot be created out of non-existence, for that reason it becomes verily established as of the form of the Brahman, as prior to creation there was nothing apart from the Brahman. Nor could this phenomenal existence give up its (former character of) being the Brahman, for the reason that nothing (dual and contrary to its nature) can verily be experienced in the Brahman except the Brahman alone. (All inferences are based on the impossibility of what is directly and immediately seen diverging in any way from its original and ultimate basis in its essential character). There can be no non-existence (of the type of the Atman ignoring its own existence) in the Atman, which is based on the testimony of self-realization, which is self-manifest, which is the passive all-witness (including itself) which is changeless and peerless. O ye Gods (that have been ignorant of the existence of the Atman) whatever has either been actually experienced, or believed by you previously as existent in this stage of worldly existence, see in it even now (and for ever more) existence alone, (it being existent in its generic aspect), whatever else (other than the real existence, that has been believed by you in the attitude, 'Apart from this there is nought, there is nought,') is non-existence alone. The real existence, (the Brahman) it will thus be seen, has not been the source of origin (of all existence in general), prior to the creation of the world or ever afterwards, as the so-called phenomenal existence has been proved to be really non-existence. . . .[9]

Are these "proofs" or tautologies? Consider, again, "answers" to the

[7] *Nrisimha Tapinyupanishad, Uttara Tapini* VIII. 1-2.
[8] *Anna-Purnopanishad*, V. 71-80.
[9] *Nrisimha-Tapinyupanishad, Uttara T[illegible]* IX.9.

question: What is the liberating knowledge?

> What brings about such false conception (of the *Atman* in what does not relate to himself), that is *Avidya*. That, by which false conception is removed, is *Vidya* . . . .[10]

> The Brahman is the truth, the highest knowledge and the infinite state. Truth is the ever-imperishable state. As to what is meant by the ever-imperishable state, while factors such as place, time and substance are subject to destruction *that which does not ultimately cease to exist is the ever-imperishable state*. As to what is meant by the highest knowledge, the awareness, which is devoid of origin, growth and decay and is incessant, is what is known as the highest knowledge (of the Brahman, that is pure sentience alone). As to what is meant by the infinite state, the sentience, which fully pervades all created phenomena, commencing from the *A-vyakta*, very much like earth pervading the various things made out of it, like gold pervading the various things made out of it, and like thread pervading the various things woven out of it, (unconditioned by place, time and substance), is what is known as the infinite state (of the Brahman). As to what is meant by bliss, the form of sentience, that is full of bliss, the residual substratum of the form of bliss, (the Brahman), is what is known as bliss. . . .[11]

> For the reason (that *Maya* is the root-cause of the belief in things apart from the Brahman), what is firmly established on the basis of a fixed idea can be uprooted only through a fixed idea. The mind becomes bound through the fixed idea, 'I am not the Brahman'. The mind (likewise) is liberated through the fixed idea. 'All is the Brahman'. By conducting one's self in accord with the notions, 'I am lean; I am subject to misery; I am possessed of hands, feet and other limbs', one gets bound. By conducting one's self in accord with the notion, 'I am not subject to misery. This body is not mine. What bondage could there be in the Atman of this (individual)?'—one gets liberated. 'I am not the flesh, nor the bones. I am the *paramatman*, that is apart from the body'. He, who is inwardly convinced in this manner, rid of his ignorance, is liberated. . . .[12]

How do we know the world was caused by Brahman?

> *For the reason that there is no second ultimate cause* (for the phenomenal world, as in the case of a pot, for making which are required a potter's wheel and other things, besides well-kneaded clay), *this phenomenal world is not generated by the operation of any other cause but the non-differentiated Brahman*; (or should the phenomenal world exist apart from the absolute Brahman and independently of it, there will be the

[10]*Sarva-Saropanishad*, 3. [11]*Ibid.*, 12. [12]

> necessity for a second cause apart from the Brahman; as no such second ultimate cause exists, the phenomenal world does not at all exist)....[13]

How do we know that the liberating knowledge will indeed free us from the cycle of births and deaths?

> ...To him, who has attained the knowledge of the truth of the Brahman, there is no more cycle of births and deaths, as before. Should there be such, he is verily one who has his face turned outwards, not having understood that real state of the Brahman....[14]

As the Brahman is supposed to be an undifferentiated, propertyless unity, how, asks a pupil, do the Upanishads speak of his *Vidya*, *Ananda* and *Turya* aspects separately?

> ...The perceptor then refutes (the arguments of the pupil) thus: (What thou sayest is no doubt) true. (However), *Vidya* becomes possessed of aspect, through the preponderance of the *Vidya*- (aspect). *Ananda* becomes possessed of aspect, through the preponderance of the *Ananda*- (aspect). Both of them become possessed of aspect, through the preponderance of both aspects together. The differentiation, (such as is apparent among them), is the difference due to the preponderance (of the respective aspects) alone. In reality, however, there is no differentiation possible at all, (they being identical in character).[15]

The reader should not think that these tautologies are just intellectual pastimes. They and the mental habit that goes with them are of immense use to those who are on the top—recall how the Upanishads abolished suffering by definition, how they defined it away by similar tautologies.

EMPTY BOXES

Close upon the heels of tautologous concepts come empty boxes, boxes into which the teacher or the aspirant is himself free to stuff such meanings as suit the occasion. The Upanishads, and they merely exemplify the tradition in this respect, manufacture a number of these boxes. The words, rituals, concepts that are so invented are extremely useful—they are the best aids for self-hypnosis, for the devotee himself endows them with "meaning" and then comes to believe that this "meaning" is inherent in them, that this is indeed *their* meaning.

Consider first the *Pranava*, *Om*, perhaps the most hallowed sound there is in the tradition. Sometimes it is said to be monosyllabled; sometimes we

[13] *Ibid.*, V, 54-60. [14] *Adhyatmopanishad*, 44-5.
[15] *Tripad-Vibhuti Maha-Narayanopanishad*, II-9, 10.

are told that it has three syllables—*A*, *U*, *M*—and an *ardha-matra* at the end; sometimes that, in fact, it has eight syllables.

> '*OM*'—this monosyllable is indicative of the *Parabrahman*. That alone should be resorted to. This (*Om*) alone is formed of eight subtle syllables. This same syllable of an eightfold character is divisiblei nto eight parts. 'A' is the first subtle syllable. 'U' is the second. 'M' is the third. The *Bindu*, (dot), is the fourth. The *Nada*, (the sound), is the fifth part. The *Kala* ist he sixth part. The *Kalatita*, (what transcends the *Kala*) is the seventh part. What is further beyond that is the eighth part. This is the *Taraka*. . . .[16]

> The *Om* is Brahman, know that the *Om* consisting of one syllable is the *Antahpranava*. It is divided into eight (*matras*)—the vowel *a*, the vowel *u*, the consonant *m*, the half syllable, the *nada*, the *bindu* the *kala*, and the *shakti*. . . .The vowel *a* consists of ten thousand parts, the vowel *u* is of a thousand parts, the letter *m* of a hundred parts and the *Ardhamatrapranava* consists of an endless number of parts. . . .The *Virat-pranava* consists of sixteen *matras* . . . the *Brahma-pranava* though only one attains the state of possessing or not possessing attributes, having attained the state of possessing 128 *matras*. . . .[17]

> The first *matra* is known as the *Ghosini*, the next as the *Vidyut*; the third is the *Patangini*, the fourth the *Vayuvegini*; the fifth is the *Nama-deva* and the sixth is called the *Aindri*, the seventh is known as the *Vaisnavi* and the eighth as the *Samkari*; the ninth is named the *Mahati* and the tenth is said to be the *Dhriti*; the eleventh will be the *Hari* and the twelfth the *Brahmi*. . . .[18]

But this is just a minor part of the matter. Obviously the word "syllable" is being used loosely here.

Let us look at the substantive part of the question: what do "*A*," "*U*," "*M*" and the *ardhamatra* at the end signify?

Here then are some of the meanings that are attributed to "*A*":

> (It is) the waking state, outwardly cognitive, having seven limbs, having nineteen mouths, enjoying the gross (*sthu'a-bhuj*), the common-to-all-men (*taijasa*). . . .[19]

> It is the *Rig-veda* and has the Brahman as its presiding deity and the eight *Vasus* as its subsidinary deities.[20]

[16] *Tara-Saropanishad*, II.1, also *Dhyanabindupanishad*, 9-14.
[17] *Narada-Parivrajakopanishad*, 8.2, 3.
[18] *Nadabindupanishad*, 9.11.
[19] *Mandukyopanishad*, 3.
[20] *Atharvasikhopanishad*, 1.3-6, also *Nrisimha-Tapiniyupanishad*, *Purva-Tapini*, II.2.

(It) is of a colour which is a mixture of red and yellow....[21]

(It is) the *Jagrita* (state of waking), experiencing the gross forms of the quintuplicated great elements....[22]

(From it) came forth Brahman (the creator) who became the *Jambavat* (the king of bears)....[23]

(It) is verily of the four forms (*Udatta, Svarita, Anudatta* and *Jnana* ...), it is identical with the first quarter of the Atman of four forms... the gross, subtle, *Bija* and *Sakshi* forms of the *A-kara* (of the *Pranava*) respectively becoming identical with the corresponding forms of the first quarter (of the Atman), each to each, as follows: the gross form of the first quarter, the *Jagrata-Jagrata*, wherein there is clear perception of all objects through the senses and the mind, becomes identical with the gross form of the *A-kara*, which is distinctly manifest as the *Plutodatta*; the subtle form of the first quarter, the *Jagarana-Svapna*, wherein the outer senses are not manifest and the inner alone are active and have the fullest and freest play, the *Dirgha-Svarita*, which does not outwardly express its import; the *Bija* form of the first quarter, the *Jagrata-Sushupti*, wherein internal and external functions abate entirely, becomes identical with *Bija* form of the *A-kara*, the *Hrasvanudatta*, forming its seed; the passive form of the first quarter, the *Jagarana-Turya*, which is the operative cause of the awareness of percepts, internal and external, brought about by the knowledge or ignorance of the Atman and which manifests the presence or absence of such internal or external functioning, becomes identical with the *Sakshi* form of the *A-kara*, which is only mental and bears testimony to the ignorance of the Atman. Again from the point of view of what they attain, there is identity between the two, the first quarter of the Atman being capable of attaining all experiences of the phenomenal world and the *A-kara*, being capable of leading and attaining the state of all components of articulate speech, it being the very root-source of speech. Further from the of point view of their being the foremost, (each in its sphere), there is identity between the two, the first quarter of the Atman, being the first division out of which the other divisions, nay all things embraced by the Atman, derive their existence, while the *A-kara*, the first *matra* of the *Pranava*, is the root-source of all sounds which go to make up speech of the form of the *Vedas*, the *Shastra* s, the *Ithihasa*-s, the *Purana*-s, the *Mantra* s and all departments of knowledge, codified and not codified. Lastly, this identity between the two is capable of being thoroughly established out of the correspondence between their respective fourfold features *viz.*, the gross, the subtle, the *Bija* and the *Sakshi*

[21] *Atharvashikhopanishad*, I.7
[22] *Tara-Saropanishad*, II. 2-5, also III. 1-9
[23] *Atharvashikhopanishad*, III.1

(as fully set forth above). He who knows thus, verily attains all this and likewise becomes foremost of all.[24]

(It) is the terrestrial region (the seven islands girt by seven seas).[25]

(It is identical with Atman) for the reason that both of them have no origin, are immortal, have no dotage...are free from fear, are free from sorrow of all kinds, are devoid of all delusion...nor are subject to relative differentiation...and lastly both of them stand apart unattached.[26]

The '*A*' alone will be the *Vishva*.[27]

It is the *Bija*.[28]

(In it) the earth, fire, the *Rig-veda*, the world *Bhur* and *Pitamaha* (Brahman) have found their repose....It is of yellow colour and unrhythmic quality.[29]

(It) is the right wing of that King of birds, the *Vairaj-Pranava*.[30]

(It) is composed of a thousand limbs...(it) relates to *Agni* (the *Viraj*).[31]

It is the past.[32]

It has its seat in the middle of the forehead, in the middle of the region of the Sun...(it has) the form of the Moon.[33]

(It) is in the waking state and in the eye of all beings . . . (it) is the *Viraj*, the *Vishva* and the *Sthul* . . . (it) is the *Rajasik* (mobile), red in colour, Brahman and sentient . . . (in it) is dissolved Brahman.[34]

It is *Rechaka* (a variety of *Pranayama*) . . . .[35]

And here are the meanings attributed to the second syllable "*U*":

It is the *Yajur-veda* with Vishnu as its presiding deity and the eleven *Rudra*-s as its subsidiary deities.[36]

[24] *Nrisimha-Tapinyupanishad, Uttara-Tapini*, II.5
[25] *Ibid.*, VII.2.
[26] *Savitryupanishad*, 14.
[27] *Nadabindupanishad*, 1-4.
[28] *Pashupatabrahmopanishad, Purva-Kanda*, 19-22
[29] *Brahmavidyopanishad*, 4-9
[30] *Sandilyopanishad*, I-VI. 1-2.
[31] *Atharvashikhopanishad*, I. 3-6; also *Nrisimha-Tapinyupanishad, Purva-Tapini*, II.2.
[32] *Ibid., Uttara-Tapini*, III-2.
[33] *Aksy-Upanishad*, II. 42-48.
[34] *Dhyanabindupanishad*, 9-14.
[35] *Ibid.*, 5 8.
[36] *Yogachudamanyopanishad*, 74-78.

(It) is of a colour which is a mixture of a sheen of lightning and Krishna (blackish blue).[37]

(It) is the *Svapna* (state of dreaming) through experiencing the subtle forms of the quintuplicated elements during the dreaming state.[38]

(From it) was produced Upendra who became (Sugriva) the leader of the monkeys . . . .[39]

The *Taijasa*, the *Hiranya-garbha*, (the second quarter of the Atman), having its seat in the dreaming state (wherein subtle perceptions, such as are experienced in dreams, prevail), manifests itself in the four forms, gross, subtle, *Bija* and *Sakshi*, in the four subdivisions of this state. The *Svapna-Jagarana*, wherein there is the revelling of the body and the organs of perception and action in objects of pleasure in a way peculiar to dreams, is the gross form; the *Svapna-Svapna*, the indulgence of the mind in ideations peculiar to dreams, is the subtle form; the *Svapna-Susupti*, wherein the gross perceptions and the subtle ideations peculiar to dreams are in a dormant state, is the *Bija* form; and the *Svapna-Turya*, wherein there is passive testimony to the cessation of even the impressions of such external and internal experiences peculiar to dreams, is the *Sakshi* form of the second quarter. This is hence of a fourfold character and is the *U-kara* (the second *matra* of the *Pranava*). This *U-kara* which is verily of the four forms, *Plutodatta*, *Dirgha-Svarita*, *Hrasvanudatta* and *Jnana-rupa*) and is hence fourfold in character, is identical with the second quarter through the gross, subtle, *Bija* and *Sakshi* forms of the second *matra* of the *Pranava* which surpasses the other *Matra*-s, even as the second quarter of the Atman, which excels all that it embraces, through both of them occupying the second place in their respective spheres, (the one being the second quarter experiencing the second state, the other being the second *Matra* of the *Pranava*), and also through their being composed of gross, subtle, *Bija* and *Sakshi* constituents. He who knows thus verily raises himself to the highest glory and, after attaining uninterrupted continuance of knowledge, gets equality of status with the overlord of the Universe, the Supreme Being . . . .[40]

It is the *Antariksha*, the mid-ethereal region.[41]

It is identical with the Atman that is self-manifest, the transcendent Brahman, the lord *Nrisimha*, for the reason that both of them are excellent, are the causes of the creation of all phenomenal existence, cause them to function exceedingly well by pervading them entirely, regulate

[37] *Atharvashikhopanishad*, I.7.
[38] *Ibid.*, III.1.
[39] *Tara-Saropanishad*, II 2 5.
[40] *Nrisimha-Tapaniyopanishad*, *Uttara-Tapani*, II 6.
[41] *Ibid.*, *Uttara Tapani*, III 3.

them in various ways after developing immense affection for them, act in a way contributing to the excellence of all beings, ward them off from taking to the wrong path, eclipse all other perception completely, are subject to the delusion of assuming different forms that are not their own and cross over the changeful state of ignorance through self-realization.[42]

It is the *Taijasa*, the *Upasaka* . . . .[43]

It is the *Sahkti* . . . .[44]

(In it) the intermediate region, *Yajur-veda*, the Air, the world *Bhuvar*, *Vishnu* and *Janardan* have found their repose . . . (it) is rhythmic in quality and of white colour.[45]

It is the left wing of the King of birds, the *Vairaj-Pranava*.[46]

It relates to the Air, the *Sutratman* . . . .[47]

It is the present.[48]

(It) resembles the Moon in its brightness and is well placed in the middle of it (the region of the Moon in the middle of the forehead) . . . (it is) to be understood as of the form of the . . . Sun . . . .[49]

(It) is in the throat in the dreaming state . . . . It is the *Hiranyagarbha*, the *Taijasa* and the *Sukshama* . . . . (It) is *Satvik* (of rhythm) white in colour and *Vishnu* . . . .[50]

Puraka, (a variety of *Pranayama*), possesses its character . . . .[51]

(It is) the dreaming state, inwardly cognitive, having seven limbs, having nineteen mouths, enjoying the exquisite, the brilliant (*Taijasa*) . . . .[52]

Similarly, here are some of the meanings that are endowed to the third syllable, "*M*":

It is the *Sama-veda* with Rudra as its presiding deity and the twelve *Aditya*-s as its subsidiary deities. It is of white colour . . . .[53]

[42] *Ibid.*, VII.2.
[43] *Savitry-Upanishad*, 14.
[44] *Nadabindupanishad*, 1-4.
[45] *Aksy-Upanishad*, II. 42-48.
[46] *Dhyanabindupanishad*, 9-14.
[47] *Ibid.*, 6-8.
[48] *Pashupatabrahmopanishad*, *Purva-Kanda*, 19-22.
[49] *Brahmavidyopanishad*, 4-9.
[50] *Yogachudmanyopanishad*, 74-78.
[51] *Sandilyopanishad*, I. VI. 1,2.
[52] *Mandukyopanishad*, 4.
[53] *Atharvasikhopanishad*, I. 3-6, I.7; *Nrisimha-Tapinyupanishad*, *Purva-Tapini*, II.2.

It is the *Sushupti* (state of sleeping) wherein the experiences of the gross and subtle elements in their quintuplicated and non-quintuplicated states, individually and collectively are in their potential state, lying in a dormant condition.[54]

(From it) evolved Shiva, the suspicious one (who) became Hanuman.[55]

The *Prajna*, the *Ishvara*, (the third quarter of the Atman), having its seat in the sleeping state, wherein there is complete ignorance of perception of gross forms, such as the pot and the like, wherein there is complete non-occurrence of impressions left by such gross perceptions and the like, wherein there is apparent abatement, through the veil of ignorance of the transformations of the mind, as they are retained as subtle impressions with the cessation of functioning of the organs of perception and action as well as the mind, and wherein there is only the passive (dormant) sentience, (that could bear testimony to the presence or absence of the phenomena of the previous state), which assumes the gross, subtle, *Bija* and *Sakshi* forms which are four in number as aforesaid, (in the *Sushupta-Jagarana*, the *Sushupta-Svapna*, the *Sushupta-Sushupta* and *Sushupta-Turya*-states respectively) and is hence of a fourfold character, is verily the *Ma-kara* alone (the third *matra* of the *Pranava*). This *Ma-kara* (even though incapable by itself of being sounded in four different ways as it is not a *svara* (vowel), yet, for the reason that when it is contiguous with and is sounded along with the *A-kara* which is of the character of all letters, it verily assumes all the four forms and is hence of a fourfold character. Hence it is identical with the third quarter, through the gross, subtle, *Bija* and *Sakshi* forms of the third *matra* of the *Pranava*. as it marks off the limit of the *Pranava*, even as the third quarter of the Atman marks off the extreme limit of the entire phenomenal world as the *Sakshi-Chaitanya*; also for the reason that in the *Ma-kara* of the *Pranava*, the entire universe has its dissolution even as in the *Prajnatman* of the third quarter corresponding to the *Ma-kara*, the waking and the dreaming states with their concomitants meet with their dissolution and, lastly, for the reason that both of them are composed of the gross, the subtle, the *Bija* and the *Sakshi* elements. He who knows thus marks the extreme limit of all this (phenomenal world) by reaching the highest state of existence and becomes the destroyer of all false existence.[56]

bly radiant in point of attributes as well as substance, are adorable, liberated and thoroughly detached, are the supreme controllers of all phenomenal existence both constitute the supreme states of existence, sentience and bliss and both are also possessed of the highest powers.[58]

> It is the *Prajna* . . . .[59]

> It is *Kilaka* . . . .[60]

> (It) is of black colour and inert quality . . . .[61]

> It is the tail of the King of birds, the *Vairaj-Pranava*, . . . it shines like the disc of the Sun.[62]

> It is the future.[63]

> (It) is like the fire in appearance, is smokeless and resembles lightning.[64]

> It is *Karna*, the *Avyakrta* and the *Prajna*. . . . It is *Tamsik*, black in colour and Rudra . . .[65]

> It is of the variety of *Kumbhaka* (a form of *pranayama*).[66]

And here, finally, are some of the meanings assigned to the half-syllable, the *ardhamatra:*

> It is one without an element, with which there can be no dealing, the cessation of development, benign, without a second.[67]

> It is the head of the King of birds, *Vairaj-Pranava* . . . . It is of the form of Varuna (the *Turya*).[68]

> It is the lunar region, the *Atharva-veda*, it has *Samvartakagni* as its presi-
> ding deity and the seven *Marut*-s as its subsidiary deities . . . . It is of the
> colour of the sheen of lightning and of all colours. It has the *Purusha*,
> that fills up, through his *Turya* form, all *matra*-s (standards of measure),
> may the entire phenomenal world which forms the basis of all standards
> of measure, as its presiding deity. . . . It is the *Turya*-state which reveals

[58] *Ibid.*, *Uttara-Tapini* VII.2.
[59] *Savitry-Upanishad*, 14.
[60] *Nadabindupanishad*, 1-4 & 6-8.
[61] *Pashupatabrahmopanishad*, *Purva-Kanda*, 19-22.
[62] *Brahmavidyopanishad*, 4-9.
[63] *Sandilyopanishad*, 1.6.1, 2.
[64] *Nadabindupanishad*, 1-8.
[65] *Aksy-Upanishad*, II. 42-48.
[66] *Dhyanabindupanishad*, 9-14.
[67] *Yogachudamanyopanishad*, 74-78.
[68] *Mandukyopanishad*, 12.

the presence or absence of the experiences of the waking, dreaming or sleeping states. . .[69]

It indicates *Ishvara* and of itself became Shatrughana, wielder of the discuss. . . .[70]

Four features are noteworthy in these and similar accounts. First, unless one takes the view that all words mean the same thing, the accounts are not entirely consistent. Second, as the variations in the accounts themselves, if nothing else, show the meanings are *put into* the words by imaginative seers and devotees. Third, once this practice is begun, this practice of endowing meanings, there is no end to it. Just as meanings and associations are conjured up for the three syllables and for the *ardha-matra* of the *Pranava*, meanings and associations are conjured up for a variety of other expressions too—for "*Ksha*," *Klim*," "*Om Narayana*," "*Ram*," "*Aham*," for letters of the alphabet such as *ya*, *ra*, *la*, *va*, *ha*, and so on.[71] What can be done for *Ksha*, *Klim*, *ya*, *ra*, etc., can also be and, therefore, is done for beads, marks, rituals. Beads, threads, rituals, marks etc., all acquire associations and meanings. Beads having different number of facets come to acquire meanings different one from the other and so on.[72]

Finally, as was noted in Chapter 6 above, these syllables, words, phrases, beads, marks, rituals take flight on their own; even though they begin their existence as mere aids to meditation, in the febrile minds of the devotees they actually come to possess the powers that men have put into them.[73] As such they serve a vital purpose. They become, as we noted earlier, the most effective aids for self-hypnosis.

TWO CENTRAL CONCEPTS

"But are you not making too much of all this? After all, '*Om*,' etc., are just aids to meditation. They are not central to the philosophical position of the Upanishads."

[69] *Atharvashikhopanishad*, 1.3-7. 3-1; also *Nrisimha-Tapinyupanishad*, *Uttara-Tapini*, 3.5.

[70] *Tara-Saropanishad*, 2.2-5, 3. 1-9. .

[71] For representative constructions see *Aksamalikapanishad*, 5; *Gopala-Tapinyupanishad*, *Purva-Tapini*, III, *Tara-Saropanishad*, I.4-6; *Nrisimha Tapiny Upanishad*, *Uttara Tapini*, VII.4; *Rama-Tapinyupanishad*, *Uttara-Tapini*, II-5-8; *Rama-Rahasyopanishad*, V.4-15; *Dhyanabindupanishad*, 94-106

[72] For representative attributions see *Aksamalikopanishad*, 3; *Rudrakshajabalopanishad*, 26-42; *Kalagnirudropanishad*, 6-8; *Brihajjabalopanishad*, V.1,2; *Ibid*, VII. 13,14; *Vasu-devopanishad*, *et. passim*, *Rudropanishad*, 6-24. Just as the meanings attributed to sounds words etc., differ, so do the rituals that are prescribed as well as the import of the beads, marks etc. As an exercise, the reader should compare the *Kalagnirudropanishad*, *Jabalyopanishad*, *Brihajjabalopanishad* and the *Bhasmajabalopanishad* on the rituals to be followed and the import of the *Rudraksha* beads.

[73] See, for instance, *Dhyanabindupanishad*, 14-18; *Tara-Saropanishad*, II. 6, 7 and passages cited in notes 31-46 in Chapter 6 above.

Alas, the position is little different even in regard to concepts which *are* crucial to the philosophical position. As the Upanishads, *Brahma-Sutra*-s and *Gita* the formulate them, Brahman and Atman, are no more verifiable than, say, *Karma* or *Rita* or *Maya*. And as in the case of the latter and precisely for the same reason--their non-falsifiability--a host of contradictory assertions are made about even such central concepts as Brahman and Atman.

I shall illustrate this fact—the fact that even Brahman and Atman have been shorn of all meaning, the fact that even they have been reduced to being empty boxes into which anything the disputant wants can be stuffed —by recalling for the reader some diverse assertions first about Brahman, then about Atman and, finally, about the relation of the two.

BRAHMAN

Does Brahman have parts? The reader will recall that numerous passages have been cited earlier which affirm that "It is neither gross nor minute, neither short nor long,"[74] that "Brahman is without prior or posterior, without interior or exterior. . .,"[75] that "as a lump of salt is without interior or exterior, entirely and purely saline in taste, even so is the Self without interior or exterior, entire and pure intelligence alone,"[76] that "there is no diversity whatsoever in it,"[77] that precisely because He is partless, formless, because He is like none of the conceivable or knowable entities does the description "*Neti-neti*" occur, "because," as the Upanishad says, "there is no other and more appropriate description than this 'Not so'."[78]

The *Brahma-Sutra*-s summarize these and hundreds of other passages by saying that "not even according to place can Brahman have a twofold characteristic for everywhere (it is taught to be without attributes),"[79] that the various parts or differences mentioned occasionally in the Upanishads are each negated individually in the Upanishads themselves,[80] that formlessness, partlessness is "the dominant note" of the Upanishads,[81] that the Upanishads declare Brahman to be "Consciousness alone."[82] They go on to explain that the apparent differences in Brahman and His creation are like the reflections of the one Sun in several different pots[83] and that we do not always see this "since Brahman has entered into the limiting adjuncts, It seems to participate in their increase and decrease."[84]

But in the face of all this Ramanuja is able to assert that Brahman *has* parts and attributes, that sentient souls and non sentient matter together constitute His splendidly variegated body. He is able to maintain this because, as we shall see more fully in the next chapter, the texts contradict each other, because all assertions in the texts are held by the tradition to be equally valid and, most important, because the concept under discussion is in any case non varifiable. While Shankara asserts that Brahman is a

74 *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, 3.8.8.
75 *Ibid.*, 2-5-19.
76 *Ibid.*, 4-5-13.
77 *Ibid.*, 4-4-19.
78 *Ibid.*, 2-3-6.
79 *Brahma-Sutra*-s, 3.2.11.
80 *Ibid.*, 3.2.12.
81 *Ibid.*, 3.2.14.
82 *Ibid.*, 3.2.16.
83 *Ibid.*, 3.2. 15, 18, 19, 25.
84 *Ibid.*, 3.2.20.

consciousness so pure that It cannot even have conscious knowledge of Itself, Ramanuja is able to assert the exact opposite about the same Brahman —that far from being anything of the sort, He is "a *Knower*, a knowing subject," (He is said, for instance, to "*enjoy*" bliss, to be "*pleased*" by some and "*displeased*" by other acts) that consciousness like bliss, is but one of His attributes, that, like joy, grief, etc., consciousness too is a mutable, a changing, attribute of the immutable Brahman, that, indeed, it is just not possible to have consciousness without an object of consciousness any more than "the act of cutting can take place when there is no place to cut and nothing to cut," that nothing can be an object of consciousness without being differentiated, that as Brahman is an object of consciousness, He *is* differentiated, that He *does* have parts and attributes, and that the *Advaitin* who insists on non-difference "is in fact no better than a man who asserts that his own mother never had any children."[85]

While texts after texts declare Brahman to be devoid of attributes, to be without parts, action, change, defect, virtue, and, vice,"[86] to be "soundless, touchless, colourless, undiminishing,"[87] Ramanuja declares Brahman to be "an ocean of auspicious qualities." He insists that "no text teaches Brahman to be *nirguna*," that the denials of the *Neti neti* sort are meant to "deny the evil attributes alone."[88]

The difficulties in consistently maintaining any reasonable position about empty boxes of this kind are well illustrated by Ramanuja's assertion that sentient souls and non-sentient matter constitute the body of Brahman. The disputant maintains that a thing can be the body of another in one of five senses: that it is an aggregate of earth and other elements, that it is an abode of sense activity, that it is an abode of fruition, that it is an abode of enjoyment, that its activity depends on the will of that being. He then shows that soul and matter cannot be held to be Brahman's body in any of these senses and, moreover, that the texts specifically affirm that Brahman is bodiless. How does Ramannja meet these objections? First, he cites counter-texts; second, he invents meaning for them (thus he maintains that when the *Kathopanishad* refers to Brahman as "bodiless among the bodies," it only intends to deny of Him a body embroiled in *karma*); finally, and this is what is relevant to our present discussion, he falls back on a tautology: a body, he says, is "any substance which a sentient soul is capable of completely controlling and supporting for its own purposes and which stands to the soul in an entirely subordinate position"; now, as Brahman is by definitiont he Inner Ruler of all souls and all matter, the latter are automatically His body![89]

[85] *Vedanta-Sutras with Ramanuja's Commentary, op. cit.*, pp. 39-45, 52-53, 58, 81, 84 and several other places.

[86] *Shvetashvataropanishad*, 6.19.

[87] *Kathopanishad*, 3.15.

[88] *Vedanta-Sutraswith Ramanuja's Commentary, op. cit.*, pp. 78-102, 143, 237 and several other places.

[89] *Ibid.*, pp. 419-425.

ATMAN

Atman, as the texts and the commentaries employ the term, has no more verifiable content than Brahman. Accordingly, no one has any difficulty whatsoever in asserting what he wants about it.

The overwhelming number of Upanishadic allusions to the Atman, as we have seen earlier, declare it to be pure, undifferentiated consciousness, they declare it to be one with Brahman. But as none can be certain, each can assert what he will. As against Kapila and Sugata who maintain that the Atman is pure intelligence, Kanada maintains that it is in essence non-intelligent, intelligence is only an adventitious attribute of it. *Sutra* 2.3.19 (and following it Ramanuja) declares it to be neither of these and to be, a knower, a knowing subject. Does The *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad* (4.5.15) not ask "by what should one know the *knower*?" Does the *Prashn-opanishad* (4.9) not speak of it as "the *knower*, the *hearer*, the *smeller*, the *taster*, the *perceiver*, the *thinker*, the *agent*?"

While Shankara, following the bulk of the statements in the Upanishads as well as the general direction of their argument, maintains that the Atman is formless and devoid of attributes, Ramanuja lists specification after specification of the attributes of the Atman. He is so certain that the Atman has the properties he attributes to it that, having attributed them to it, he insists that all passages which refer to a formless, attribute-less entity just do not pertain to the Atman at all, that they refer instead to Brahman. The essential nature of the Atman, he says at many points in his commentary on the *Brahma-Sutra*-s, is intelligence while that of Brahman is bliss[90] (only to maintain later that "Brahman has both intelligence and bliss for its nature. . . "[91]). While Shankara insists that the Atman is Brahman, Ramanuja asserts often that the Atman just cannot experience or contain the *quantum* of bliss that the Upanishads attribute to Brahman and that, therefore, the two are different. While Shankara maintains that both Brahman and Atman are completely devoid of all attributes, Ramanuja posits the difference between the two on the ground, among others, that Brahman is free of all evil attributes (being "an ocean of auspicious qualities"), but the soul alternates between purity and impurity, that it is often saturated with evil attributes.[92] While Shankara insists the two are identical, Ramanuja insists that qualities and states such as "being higher than the higher imperishable" (*Mundakopanishad*, 1.1.5-6, 2.1.2), of "knowing all, cognizing all" (*Mundakopanishad*, 1.1.9; *Shvetashvataropanishad*, 2.2.7), of "invisibility, etc.," alluded to in *Brahma-Sutra*-s (1.2.22), of the ability to cause fear and fearlessness, of realizing its desires instantaneously (as Brahman is said to create the universe by merely desiring to be many) of being the inner ruler, of dispensing boons and punishments, that

[90] *Ibid.*, c.f. his commentary on *Sutra*, 2.3.29, p.550.
[91] *Ibid.*, for instance, pp. 229, 232, 233, 235.
[92] *Ibid.*, for instance, pp. 225-226, 239, 240, 469 and 653.

all these belong to Brahman alone and can never be acquired by the Atman.[93] Indeed, so great is the gulf between the two, maintains Ramanuja, that "the Highest Self cannot be fully understood by the individual self."[94]

Does the Atman suffer? Following hundreds of affirmations in the Upanishads and the *Gita* about the soul being beyond pain and pleasure, about its being immutable, a Shankara will maintain (not always consistently, as we shall see later) that it does not suffer. Ramanuja, on the other hand, looks upon it as "conditioned by nescience, involved in endless suffering and undergoing alternate states of purity and impurity," he maintains that it grieves—being "bewildered by *Prakriti*"—that it is susceptible to injury (unlike Brahman), that (again unlike Brahman) it breathes in and out and is not even above hunger.[95]

It will be worth while to follow this last question—whether the soul is or is not beyond suffering—for a while. We will learn a bit about how the disputants appropriate texts, about how the texts themselves are treacherous guides, about how the disputants are led to invent new concepts and about how these concepts, far from settling the question, only involve the inventors themselves into further contradictions.

Consider first a couple of illustrative texts on either side of the fence.

The basic position is contained in a stanza such as the following: "similarly the self, that is but one in all beings, *is not tainted by sorrows of the world*, it being transcendental."[96] The *Gita*, as is well-known, repeatedly refers to the Atman as not just being indestructible but also immutable, as one whose state cannot change and which, therefore, cannot be assumed to pass from a state of elation to one, say, of suffering and despondency.[97] The standard distinction be.ween the entity that suffers and the Atman which is beyond suffering is given in the following stanza: "It is through the mind that one hears and sees. . . .Desire, resolve, doubt, faith, want of faith, steadiness, unsteadiness, shame, intelligence and fear—all these are but the mind."[98] Accordingly, the *Brahma-Sutra*-s when they are dealing with texts such as these tell us that it is the intellect which experiences and not the soul, that the soul is often wrongly regarded as being the experiencer because of its association with the modes of the intellect.[99]

However, texts that affirm the contrary are not lacking. "For the soul as long as it is in the body," states the *Chandogya*, "*there is no release from pleasure and pain till it is free from the body*, then neither pleasure nor pain touch it."[100] Or take *Shevtashvatara's* view that "the soul, not being the lord, *is bound because he has to enjoy*."[101] Or consider stanzas 19-21, chapter 13 in

[93] *Ibid.*, for instance, pp. 214, 231, 234, 239, 283-285, 297, 350, 351, 352, 357, [illegible], 469, 470, 766-767, 769.

[94] *Ibid.*, p. 396.

[95] *Ibid.*, for instance, pp. 225-226, 234, 654-658.

[96] *Kathopanishad*, 5-11.

[97] For a quick reference, see chapters 2 and 3 of the *Gita*.

[98] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, 1.5.3.

[99] *Brahma-Sutra-s*, 2.3.[illegible]

[100] *Chandogyopanishad*, 8.12.1.

[101] *[illegible]upanishad*, 1.8.

the *Gita* itself—there a distinction is made between *Prakriti* and the self and the latter is said to be the cause of experiencing pleasure and pain and as the experiencer of these. Or consider the affirmation in the *Kathopanishad* that "the self combined with senses and mind wise men call *the enjoyer*."[102] A little later it again refers to the soul as "*the honey-eater*," the experiencer.[103] The *Brahma-Sutra*-s, committed as they are to upholding everything in the Upanishads, switch from their previously stated position and now maintain that the individual soul *does* experience states such as pleasure and pain while the Supreme Self does *not* and that it is precisely for this reason that the individual soul is merely a reflection of the Supreme Self.[104]

Given texts of this kind, it will surprise no one that the Shankaras and the Ramanujas, committed as they are to *shabda pramanda*, find it impossible to maintain one position consistently. We find Shankara often slipping into saying that the soul *does* experience pleasure and pain after all, just as we find Ramanuja (having distinguished between Brahman and Atman on the ground, among others, that the former does *not* and the latter *does* experience pleasure and pain) slipping into saying that the Absolute too experiences these states.

There is not the space to document this matter in detail. I will merely sketch a few representative passages from Shankara's *Bhashya* of the *Brahma-Sutra*-s as an illustration and leave detailed documentation of these embarrassing flip-flops as an exercise for the reader.

Shankara's basic position is well known: Brahman and Atman are one and this entity does not experience. In commenting on *Sutra*-s 2.3.29-3, for instance, he affirms that "in reality there is no such thing as an individual soul apart from what appears under the influence of the intellect acting as a conditioning factor. For when engaged in ascertaining the purport of the Upanishads we do not come across any other (second) conscious entity besides God who is by nature ever free."[105]

[102] *Kathopanishad*, 3.4. The same passage occurs elsewhere, e.g., in *Paingalopanishad*, 4.3.

[103] *Kathopanishad*. 4.5.

[104] *Brahma-Sutra*-s, 2.3.46, 50. How is poor Shankara to get over this embarassing affirmation? Simple: by declaring that as this suffering of the soul is born of an illusion (*i.e.*, because of its illusory association with the body) it too is an illusion! "We solemnly declare," he says in explaining away *Sutra* 2.3.46, "that God does not suffer the woes of the world like an individual being. The individual soul, *under the influence of ignorance, seems to* become identified with the body, etc., and it suffers the sorrow occurring to the body, arising out of its belief that the sufferings created by ignorance are its own. But God has no such identity with the body, etc., nor any conception of suffering in Himself. In the case of the individual soul as well," and here is the sleight-of-hand, "the feeling of suffering it has, *arises from an error* consisting in not realizing its difference from the limiting adjuncts constituted by the body, organs, etc., which are created by name and form that are the products of ignorance; *but in reality it has no* suffering." *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya*, Gambhirananda (tr.), Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1972, pp. 510-511.

[105] *Ibid.*, p.490.

Similarly he later records that the knower of Brahman has the following realization: "As opposed to the entity known before as possessed of agentship and experienceship by its very nature, I am Brahman which is by nature devoid of agentship and experienceship in all the three periods of time. Even earlier, I was never an agent and experiencer, nor am I at present, nor shall I be so in future."[106]

But given the contradictions in the texts themselves and given his commitment to regarding every expression in the Upanishads as equally valid, we often find Shankara asserting that the soul *does* experience and in so doing it *differs from* Brahman who does *not* experience. In commenting on *Sutra* 1.2.8, for instance, we find him saying that "just because Brahman has some relationships with the hearts of all beings, it does not follow that Brahman experiences happiness and sorrow like the embodied souls; for there is a difference. There is forsooth a difference between the embodied soul and the supreme God. The one is an agent, an experiencer (of happiness and sorrow), a source of merit, demerit, etc., and possessed of happiness and sorrow, while the other is just the opposite, being possessed of such qualities as freedom from sin, and so on. Because of this distinction between the two, the one experiences, but not the other. If from the mere fact of proximity, a causal relation with some effect is postulated, then space, for instance, can as well become burnt, (it being connected with fire)."[107] Soon he is referring to the fact of "experiencing the fruits of work" as an indictory mark—as the distinctive characteristic—of the individual, embodied self[108]. A little later while commenting on *Sutra* 1.2.12 he again says that "this line of approach (of assuming that the individual self and the Supreme Self are the ones that are being talked about) has to be adopted with regard to 'two birds, ever associated and having similar names, (cling to the same tree)' (*Mundaka*, 3.1.1., *Shvetashvatara*, 4.6) and such other texts. There also the ordinary birds are not spoken of, since the topic centres round the soul. In the text, 'of these two, the one eats the fruits of divergent tastes,' (*ibid.*), the individual self is to be understood on the basis of the indicatory marks of eating. And in, 'the other looks on without eating' (*ibid*), the Supreme Self is to be understood on the strength of non-eating and consciousness. In the succeeding *Mantra* also these two are specified as the seer and the object seen. On the same tree the individual soul remains drowned (*i.e.*, stuck) as it were, and so it moans, being worried by its impotence; when it sees thus the other, the adored Lord, and His glory, then it becomes 'liberated from sorrow' (*Mundakopanishad*, 3.1.2)."[109] In all this Shankara is clearly maintaining that the soul *is* different from the Brahman, that the former *does* suffer and that the latter *does not*.

We proceed barely two pages to find him execute another about-turn: enjoyership, etc., he says, are attributed to the mind which is subject to worldly moods like happiness, sorrow, etc.; sometimes they are also *falsely* attribut-

[106] *Ibid.*, p.837.
[107] *Ibid.*, p.117.
[108] *Ibid.*, p.122-123.
[109] *Ibid.*, p.124; see also his commentary on *Sutra*, 1.3.7.

ed to the soul because of a failure to discriminate between the nature of the mind and the soul: "In reality these (the agentship and experienceship)," he concludes, "are possible *in neither of them*: for the mind is insentient and the soul is changeless. This is all the more impossible in the mind, it being a creation of ignorance . . . ."[110] In a moment, therefore, he travels from maintaining that the soul itself experiences to insisting that even the intellect does not experience!

In his comment on *Sutra* 1.2.20 he is asserting that "this mention of the distinction between the embodied soul and the internal ruler *is based on the limiting adjuncts* of the body and senses, conjured up by ignorance, but this is not so in the real sense. For the indwelling self can be but one and not two. The same one, however, is mentioned as two owing to *conditioning factors*, as, for instance, it is said 'the pot space,' 'the cosmic space'." But does this not mean that the conditioning factors at least are real? After all, if they are not real how can they lead even the Upanishads to use misleading expressions? How come the Upanishads refer to them as "*varied*?" As in his subsequent discussion about transmigration and enjoyership of the soul we find Shankara dismissing the limiting adjuncts and the conditioning factors as non-existent at one point and talking of them as real at another.[111]

This is not the end of the matter, of course. By the time he reaches *Sutra* 1.4.6 Shankara contrasts the individual soul and the Supreme Lord on the ground that "birth and death can occur to the embodied soul owing to its association with the body but not to the Supreme Lord",[112] just as a little earlier (while commenting on *Sutra*-s 1.2.33 and 1.3.19) he has stated that the individual soul is subject to illusion, that, in fact, its being so subject is one of the things that *distinguishes* it from Brahman who is above all illusion all the time.[113] (He will be saying as much again when he reaches *Sutra*-s 2.3.41-43. There he will maintain, along with the *Sutra-Kara* that the individual soul *is* subject to illusion and nescience and that God wills it to be trapped in illusion or to be liberated from it according to *its* works.[114] This from the same Shankara who on most occasions stoutly maintains that the two are identical and who denies all agentship to the soul.) But he affirms the birth, death, etc., of the soul only to reverse himself on this matter by *Sutras* 2.3.15, 16, 17, when he returns to the standard position that while the body, mind, etc., are born and they die, the soul is originless, immortal, immutable.[115] "But," asks the disputant, "does the *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad* (2.1.20) not tell us that from Brahman 'all these souls *emanate*'? How do you then maintain that the souls are originless?" And here is Shankara's feeble answer: "In *most of the places* dealing with creation, the individual soul is not mentioned. As for the Vedic mention of the birth of the individual souls at some rare places that . . . is to be interpreted as caused by

[110] *Ibid.*, p. 126.
[111] *Ibid.*, for instance, pp. 136-139.
[112] *Ibid.*, p. 256.
[113] *Ibid.*, for instance, pp. 143, 189, 193.
[114] *Ibid.*, pp. 504-505.
[115] *Ibid.*, pp. 468-[illegible]

its contact with the limiting adjuncts";[116] thus he is now telling us that what is born and dies is its contact with the limiting adjuncts, not the soul itself. Even this dodge does not serve Shankara well for it brings him perilously close to conceding that the limiting adjuncts are real.

In his comment on *Sutra* 2 2.38 Shankara contrasts the Supreme Self who does not experience with the transmigrating soul that does. In his comment on *Sutra* 2.3.29 he maintains at great length that neither the Supreme Self nor the soul experiences. And in his comment on *Sutra* 2.4.16 he is back to talking of the embodied soul as "the experiencer" in contrast to the Gods.

But thus far he has been able to consistently maintain at least that the Supreme Self does *not* experience. What then of the stanza (3.1) in the *Kathopanishad* that speaks of the two selves and affirms that *both* of them "drink" the rewards? O, that's nothing, says Shankara. Just conventional usage! The statement that both the selves "drink," he says, is "on the analogy of the statement, 'the people with the umbrella are moving'," *i.e.*, when we see a king moving with an umbrella over his head we are apt to refer to his entourage as "the people with the umbrella" even though they have none;[117] use of the word "drink" is in the same manner.

The Two Birds

I could go on illustrating the discomfiture of a Shankara or a Ramanuja, but it is time to get back to the main point under discussion. We were asking whether the soul suffers or not and we noticed some texts asserting that it does and others that it does not. What is to be done? Simple—as both sets of passages must be true, it is clear that one set refers to one entity and the other to another. This is the standard, one is almost tempted to say, reflex, dodge that is adopted by the discussants. And they seek justification for doing so in a famous passage:

> Two birds, fast bound companions,
> Clasp close the self-same tree.
> Of these two, the one eats sweet fruit
> The other looks on without eating.[118]

Let us pause a while and see whether this solution works. Does it resolve the contradictions in the texts?

It does not. Indeed—as is the case with every contrived solution that tries to paper over irreconcilables—it only causes further confusion.

First, as we have already seen, there are scores and scores of passages which assert that there is just one entity, not two: "There is no other

[116] *Ibid.*, p. 473, 475. [117] *Ibid.*, p. 708.
[118] *Mundakopanishad*, 3.1.1, also *Shetashvataropanishad*, 4.6.

witness but Him," says the *Brihad-Aranyaka*;[119] "after deliberating on the experiencer, the things experienced and the ordainer," says the *Shvetashvataropanishad*, "one should know all these things to be the Brahman I speak of."[120] The two birds, therefore, require some explaining before we can accept them as two.

Second, while many texts deny that two birds exist, others affirm not just that two exist but also that *both*—and not just one as in the *Mundaka* and *Shvetashvatara* passages quoted above—experience:

There are *two* that drink of *Rita*
In the world of good deeds,
Both are entered into the secret place (of the heart),
And in the highest upper sphere.[121]

This instead of solving the problem raises, to say the least, a new proposition that has to be explained away.

But this is not the end of the matter by any means. Who or what are the two birds, in any case? Our discussants are off and running again. They are the embodied soul and Brahman, say some; no, they are the soul and the vital breath, say others. None of the above, insists a third set—they are the soul and the intellect. On this question we find Shankara consistent: he consistently maintains that the two birds cannot be the soul and Brahman as these are repeatedly declared to be one, as two selves cannot each be "the inmost self," that, in fact, the reference in "the two birds" is to the *soul* which does not experience and the *intellect* which does.[122]

This time around it is Ramanuja's turn to do the somersaults. And the matter that compels him to execute these is the fourth reason on account of which the two-birds-solution confounds the confusion. And this is the word "eating." What does "eating" mean in this context?

To start with, as should be obvious, the two stanzas are grist for Ramanuja's mill—they help him certify his position that the soul is indeed different from Brahman, that there is an "inner soul" apart from the embodied soul. But "eating" presents an embarrassment of riches—it can mean either "the devouring or reabsorption of the Universe" or "experiencing the fruit of one's deeds." Not one to miss an opportunity for imaginative constructions, Ramanuja employs both meanings! And this is what leads him to hold in one breath that the two birds are Brahman and the embodied soul (when he is taking "eating" to mean "reabsorption of the Universe")[123] and in the next that they are the embodied soul and the

[119] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, 3.7.23.
[120] *Shvetashvataropanishad*, 1.12.
[121] *Kathopanishad*, 3.1.
[122] *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya*, *op. cit.*, pp. 137, 139, 166, 710, 820, etc.
[123] As on p. 266 *Vedanta-Sutras with Ramanuja's Commentary*, *op. cit.*, and then again on p. 272.

intellect (when he is taking "eating" to mean "experiencing the fruit of one's deeds").[124] In spite of this flexibility, Ramajuna is soon to run into the same problem as Shankara. The *Katha* text (3.1) quoted above and, following it, *Brahma-Sutra* 1.2.11, asserts that *both* the entities eat. This is as inconvenient for Ramanuja as it is for Shankara. For instance, if we take the first meaning of "eating," (that of "devouring the Universe") the *Katha* stanza and the *Sutra* would imply that the individual soul too has this power of devouring the Universe; Ramanuja will be damned if he concedes this. After all, he has insisted all along that such enormous power belongs exclusively to the Supreme Self and that the non-possession of these powers is indeed one of the things that distinguishes the soul from Brahman. On the other hand, if we take the second meaning (that of "experiencing the fruit of one's deeds") it leads us to hold that the Brahman too experiences the fruit; Ramanuja will be equally damned if he concedes this. He has held all along, has he not, that one of the things that distinguishes the soul from Brahman is that the former experiences rewards while the latter is beyond them? What is to be done? Do as Shankara does! Assert that the *Kathopanishad* uses the term "drinker" only in a conventional sense, without meaning to be precise. "That the text speaks of the two selfs as drinking their reward (while actually the individual soul only does so)," he explains, "is to be understood in the same way as the phrase 'There go the umbrella bearers' (one of whom only carries the umbrella), or else," he adds a new twist now, "we may account for this on the ground that both are agents with regard to the drinking, in so far as the 'drinking' individual soul is caused to drink by the Highest Self."[125] That this latest twist lands Ramanuja into a new problem will be at once obvious: if one entity is drinking how cant he one who *causes* the first to drink be the drinker himself unless the *other* is, as Shankara maintains, *none other than himself*?

Atman's Relation To Brahman

As we now have two empty boxes, Brahman and Atman, about which anything one wants can be asserted, it should be obvious that, just as easily, anything one wants can be asserted about the relation in which one exists to another. Are the two identical? Or is it that they are different but that the soul merges into Brahman and becomes one with it upon the dawning of knowledge, the exhaustion or burning away of *karma* etc.? Or is it that the two are at all times different, the soul continuing to exist as an independent entity even upon its liberation? Passages confirming each of these views—and, indeed, many other variants of them—abound in the Upanishads. I will first list a few passages that seem to support each of the three views listed above and then note the embarrassing consequences their co-existence has for subsequent commentators. To illustrate the discomfiture of

[124]As on pp. 267-268, *ibid.*

e commentators I shall take the compiler of the *Brahma-Sutra*-s and ankara as two representative examples.

Brahman and Atman are one: The reader will recall from our previous dis-ssion numerous passages that affirm this identity. To refresh our memories t us recall a few passages from only two of the principal Upanishads—the *rihad-Aranyaka* and the *Chandogya*.

Here are a few representative statements from the *Brihad-Aranyak-panishad*:

> This soul is Brahman, the all-perceiving. (2.5.19)

> Then Ushasta Cakrayana questioned him: 'Yajnavalkya,' said he, 'explain to me who is the Brahman present and not beyond our ken, him who is the soul in all things.' 'He is your soul, which is in all things'. . . . (3.4.1)

> Quite so, O Yajnavalkya, declare the Inner Controller, . . . 'He who, dwelling in the earth, yet is other than the earth, whom the earth does not know, whose body the earth is, who controls the earth from within—He is your soul, the Inner Controller, the Immortal. . . .' (3.7.3-23)

> Verily this soul is Brahman, made of knowledge, of mind, of breath, of seeing. . . . (4.4.5)

Notice that in these and scores of other passages the identity of Atman and Brahman is absolute, it is not contingent; for instance, it is not contingent on the dawning of knowledge.

All notions of a difference between the two are condemned again and again in this as in other Upanishads. "Whoever worships another divinity (than his self) thinking, 'He is one and I another'," says the Upanishad, "he knows not. He is like a sacrificial animal to the Gods. . . ." (1.4.10); "There is on earth no diversity. He gets death after death, who perceives here seeming diversity" (4.4.19). (See also, e.g., *Katha* [2.1.11].) "Brahminhood deserts him who knows Brahminhood in aught else than in the soul. . . . Everything deserts him who knows everything in aught else than in the soul . . ." (4.5.7). And so on.

The *Chandogya* is equally unequivocal:

> Verily, what is called Brahman—that is the same as what the space outside of a person is. / Verily, what the space outside of a person is—that is the same as the space within a person is. / Verily, what the space within a person is—that is the same as the space here within the heart is . . . .(3.12.7)

> Now the light which shines higher than this heaven, on the backs of all, on the backs of everything, in the highest worlds, than which there are

no higher—verily, that is the same as this light which is here within a person. (3.13.7)

. . . That which is the finest essence, this whole world has that as its soul. That is reality. That is Atman. That art thou, Shvetaketu. (6.8.6)

The soul, indeed, is below . . . above . . . to the west . . . to the east . . . to the south . . . to the north. The soul, indeed, is this whole world. (7.25.2)

One reaches the other. But then there are many passages which affirm that the soul *reaches* Brahman, that it *attains* Brahman, that it *merges* in Him upon the dawn of knowledge.

. . . Whoever thus knows 'I am Brahman' *becomes* this All; even the gods have not the power to prevent his *becoming* thus, for he *becomes* their self . . . .[126]

Containing all works . . . all desires . . . all orders . . . all tastes, encompassing this whole world, the unspeaking, the unconcerned—this is the soul of mine within the heart, this is Brahman. *Into him I shall enter* on departing hence.[127]

As the rivers, flowing down, become indistinguishable on reaching the sea by giving up their names and forms, so also the illumined soul, *having become freed from name and form, reaches* the self effulgent *Purusha* that is higher than the higher *Maya*.[128]

When all the desires that dwell in his heart are gone, *then* he, having been mortal, *becomes* immortal and *attains* Brahman, even in this body . . . .[129]

. . . O, amiable one, he (the self) then in dreamless sleep *becomes* unified with existence.[130]

Now, if the Atman and Brahman are identical at all times then why should the Upanishads talk of *reaching, attaining, merging?* Why should they make this reaching, attaining, merging *contingent upon* the dawn of knowledge?

The two are essentially different: Similarly, there are many passages which assert that the two are essentially different, that the Atman—even upon

[126] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, 1.4.10.
[127] *Chandogyopanishad*, 3.14.4.
[128] *Mundakopanishad*, 3.2.8.
[129] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, 4.4.7.
[130] *Chandogyopanishad*, 6.8.1.

reaching Brahman after the dawn of knowledge—does not lose itself in Him, that it retains a separate existence.

> . . . this serene one (the Atman), when he rises up from this body and reaches the highest light, appears with his own form. Such a one is the supreme person. There such a one goes around laughing, sporting, having enjoyment with women or chariots or friends, not remembering the appendage of this body . . . .[131]

> . . . the self that is in the body, *being presided over* by the Supreme Self . . . .[132]

> He who dwells *in* the self and *within* the self, whom the self does not know, whose body the self is, who rules the self from within . . . .[133]

> Those who, resorting to this knowledge, *attain to the possession of qualities that characterize Me*, are not born even at creation nor hurt at dissolution.[134]

> Knowing as *separate* the *self* and the *Mover*, blessed by Him he gains immortality . . . .[135]

> There are *two*, the one knowing, the other not knowing, *both unborn*, the one a ruler, the other not a ruler.[136]

> From that the *Ruler* sends forth all this, in that the *other* is bound up through *Maya* . . . .[137]

> The master of the *Pradhana* and the souls, the lord of the *gunas*, the *lord* of nature and the *soul*, the ruler of the qualities, the cause of the bondage, existence and release of *samsara* . . . .[138]

> What is perishable is the *Pradhana*, the immortal and imperishable in Hara: the one God rules the *perishable* and the *Self*. . . .[139]

> The ruler of all, the *lord* of the *selfs*, the eternal, blessed, undecaying one . . .[140]

> Those who strive, imbued with *Yoga*, perceive him *dwelling in* the *Self* . . .[141]

[131] *Ibid.*, 8.12.2.
[132] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, 4.3.35, also 3.7.22.
[133] *Ibid.*, 3.7.22.
[134] *Gita*, 14.2.
[135] *Shvetashvataropanishad*, 1.6.
[136] *Ibid.*, 1.9.
[137] *Ibid.*, 4.9.
[138] *Ibid.*, 6.16.
[139] *Ibid.*, 1.10.
[140] *Maha-Narayanopanishad*, 11.3.
[141] *Gita*, 15.11.

There are these two beings in the world, the perishable and the imperishable. The perishable comprises all creatures, the immutable is called the imperishable. *But distinct is the Highest Spirit spoken of as the Supreme Self*, the indestructible Lord who penetrates and sustains the three worlds. Because *I transcend* the perishable and *am even higher than the imperishable*, therefore, am I known in the world and in the Veda as '*Purushottama*, the Highest Spirit.'[142]

Different from this self, which consists of understanding, *is the other Inner Self* which consists of bliss. . . .[143]

Consider now the somersaults that such disagreement in the texts compels of those who will follow the texts closely.

The compiler of the *Brahma-Sutra*-s declares in *Sutra* 1.1.20 that "the one inside (is God), his qualities having been taught." But in *Sutra*-s 1.1.16, 17, 18 he is distinguishing between an entity called "the Blissful One" and Brahman and in *Sutra* 1.1.21 he affirms clearly "and God is different (from the individual being) owing to the mention of difference." *Sutra*-s 1.2.1-3[144] when read together clearly suggest that the attributes of Brahman and Atman *are different*. *Sutra* 1.2.11 also clearly distinguishes between the two saying that "the *two* who have entered into the cavity (of the heart) are the individual Self and the Supreme Self, for that is what is seen (in other texts)." *Sutra* 1.2.18 affirms that "the internal Ruler in the divine and other contexts (is the Supreme Self) since the characteristics of that (Supreme Self) are spoken of," and *Sutra* 1.2.20 asserts that "the embodied soul also (is not the internal Ruler). . . ." Similarly, *Sutra*-s 1.2.21-23 distinguish between Brahman, *Pradhana* and the individual soul on the basis of qualities such as the power to be invisible. *Sutra* 1.2.21 states that "the entity, possessed of the qualities of not being seen, etc., is Brahman, for its characteristics are spoken of" and *Sutra*-s 1.2.22 and 23 clarify that "the other two (viz. the individual soul and *Pradhana*) are not meant, for there is the mention of the dictinctive characteristic (of Brahman) and (Its) difference (from the other two) and because there is presentation of form." *Sutra*-s 1.2.3-6 and 1.3.1-7 drive the difference between the Atman and Brahman even deeper by acknowledging that the Upanishads speak of one (the Atman) as the *subject* (which, *e.g. strives to attain*) and the other (the Brahman) as the *object* (which is, for instance, *striven after*). Later on *Sutra* 3.2.8 will talk of the soul "*waking up from*" the Supreme Self as a beings emerge from dreamless sleep.

Answers by the *Sutrakara* to two typical questions also establish him as declaring a difference between Brahman and Atman. Why should Brahman create a prison-house (e.g., the body) and enter it Himself? Would he not be a mad man if he were to do so? But the doubt should not arise, says the *Sutrakara*, as Brahman does not enter; it is the *other*—the Atman—that is cast in it; "(The Brahman is) greater (than the embodied being)," states *Sutra* 2.1-22, "on account of the declaration of the difference (between the two)." Similarly, the question arises, if there is only one undifferentiated Self then how can we speak of the works of one individual being different from those of another individual? Even if we could somehow conceive of beings acting separately one from the other as, they are one in essence, the works of '*A*' would enter a common pool and the results of those works may well come to be visited upon '*B*,' may they not? How is this inter-mixture avoided? *Sutra* 2.3.50 provides the answer: "(The individual Self)," it says, "is only a reflection (of the Supreme Self) to be sure." The analogy is of one Sun being reflected in different pots. As the souls are mere—and separate—reflections of the Supreme Self the intermingling of works and rewards, we are reassured, is avoided. In giving this answer has the *Sutrakara* not again acknowledged the very separateness of the souls from Brahman that he was so recently refuting?

I could go on, but the few *Sutra*-s I have listed will be enough to indicate
that there are enough passages in the Upanishads which assert plurality to
force anyone summarizing their doctrine to make statements that run coun-
ter to the dominant, non-dualistic note in them. This is, of course, not the
only dodge that is adopted. Here the *Sutrakara* as well as Shankara are
saying that the Lord is not affected by the limitations He creates. On other
occasions they acknowledge that He *does* enter the limiting confines He
creates and the search out "explanations" for His doing so: He enters these
limited forms, says the *Sutrakara* in *Sutra*-s 1.2.30; 31. to aid meditation;
He does so, echoes Shankara, "out of favour to His worshippers."[145]

Imagine the discomfiture of a Shankara! He has now to paper over the
twists and turns not only of the Upanishads but also of the *Brahma-Sutra*-s!
The basic difficulty, the reader must remember, is not just that the texts are
contradictory but that the basic entities that are being discussed are devoid
of all verifiable content. Accordingly, a Shankara has no choice but to flip-
flop along with the texts; he cannot settle the matter by verifying the matter
on his own.

While he is commenting on *Sutra*-s 1.1.19 and 1.3.19 we find Shankara con-
ceding that the soul's identity with Brahman is contingent upon knowledge,
that it is the *enlightened* being alone who is identical with Brahman.[146] But
then comes *Sutra* 2.1.14 which talks of "non-difference of cause and effect"
and Shankara is back to stating that the identity proclaimed in texts such as
"That thou art" is "not contingent on any particular state."[147]

[145] Cf. *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya, op. cit.*, p. 154.
[146] *Ibid.*, pp. 71, 193.
[147] *Ibid.*, p. 329.

At one moment Shankara is telling us that "... the interpretation that should be accepted by all those who follow the Upanishads is that the difference between the individual self and the Supreme Self is a creation of conditioning factors like the body, etc., constituted by name and form which are conjured up by nescience. *The difference is not real....* When the full illumination about the oneness of the Supreme Self and the self witnessing the body becomes established such terms as 'the witness of the body,' 'the Supreme Self,' betray *a mere difference in terminology*; and hence this insistence on the theory that this 'witness of the body' is different from the Supreme Self and the Supreme Self is different from the 'witness of the body,' that centres round the idea of the difference of the two selves, is meaningless. For the Self is but one, though spoken of differently on the basis of *difference in mere nomenclature.*"[148]

At the next moment he is trying to have it both ways, implying that though there is some difference, there really is none. "Though foam, ripple, wave, bubble, etc., which are different modifications of the sea, consisting of water, are non-different from the sea, still amongst themselves are perceived actions and reactions in the form of separating or coalescing. And yet the foam, wave, etc., do not lose their individuality in relation to one another, even though they are modifications of the sea and non-different from it, which is but water. Again, even though they do not lose their individuality in one another, they are never different from the point of view of their being the sea. Similar is the case here. The experiencer and the things experienced never get identified with each other, nor do they differ from the supreme Brahman. Although the experiencer is not a transformation of Brahman, for in the Upanishadic text, 'having created that He entered into that,' (*Taittiriya*, 2.6), it has been stated that He the Creator Himself, without undergoing any change, has become the experiencer by entering into his product (the body), still some difference accrues to one who has entered into the product, owing to the presence of the product which serves as the limiting adjunct just as much as space becomes divided, owing to the presence of the conditioning factors like the pot, etc. Thus it is said that though all things are non-different from the supreme cause, Brahman, still there can be such a distinction as the experiencer and the things experienced on the analogy of the sea and its waves, etc..."[149]

A little later he maintains that this ambiguous position is really not permissible, that it should be abandoned, if for no other reason than the practical consideration that no one will be motivated to persevere in his search by an uncertain trumpet and also because logically an entity cannot be "one and many, permanent and impermanent, different and non-different" at the same time.[150]

Next he goes a step further and reverts to his standard position. "It is not a fact that the Upanishads declare both difference and non-difference as equally valid in the present case; on the contrary, the Upanishads declare

[148] *Ibid.*, pp. 290-291. [149] *Ibid.*, pp. 325-326. [150] *Ibid.*, p. 429.

non-difference alone as the view to be established, while with the idea of speaking of something else (*i.e.*, non-difference) they merely refer to difference as a thing already conventionally recognized. Hence the real conclusion is this, there is no difference."[151]

While Ramanuja takes passages about the soul *reaching*, or *attaining*, or *merging* with Brahman to conclusively establish that the two are different, Shankara asserts that these expressions are used as *mere concessions* to the *popular misconception* that the two are different.[152] But just a little later he is himself saying that "... it is a settled conclusion of the Upanishads that the individual soul *becomes* unified with the Supreme Self in sleep. . . ."[153] And later still, when the unambiguity of the *Sutrakara* cannot be dodged, when he clearly says that passages about the coming and going of an entity apply to the atomic soul and *not* to the all-pervasive Brahman (for how can the all pervasive *move*?) and that, therefore, the two are different, we find Shankara going along with him.[154]

When, to get over the problem that unless we conjure up a second entity Brahman Himself would be entering the prison He has created, *Sutra* 2.2.22 clearly distinguishes between the soul and Brahman, we first find Shankara going along with the *Sutrakara*. "We speak of that entity as the Creator of the Universe," he says, "which is by nature eternal, pure, intelligent, and which is something greater than, that is to say different from, the embodied being. With regard to that Brahman, the faults of not doing what is beneficial and the like cannot arise, for there is nothing beneficial to be achieved or harmful to be eschewed by that Brahman which is by nature eternally free. Nor is there anything to debar Its knowledge or power, since It is omniscient and omnipotent. But the embodied being is not of that kind. With regard to him can arise the fault of not doing what is beneficial and the like. But we do not call him the Creator of the world. . . ."[155]

But a moment later—in fact, in the latter half of his comment on the *same Sutra*—he is back to asserting the opposite: "When the idea of non-difference is generated by such declaration of identity as 'Thou that art,' then the transmigratoriness of the individual is removed as also the creatorship of Brahman; for all dualistic dealings, brought about by unreal ignorance, get sublated by right knowledge. Then in that state where can creation come from, and from where the defects like non-accomplishment of beneficial results, etc. We have stated more than once that mundane existence, characterized by non-accomplishment of beneficial results, etc., is an error arising from the non-recognition of the difference (from the soul) of the limiting adjuncts constituted by the assembly of the body and senses which are a creation of name and form called up by ignorance. It does not exist in reality."[156]

When the *Sutrakara* declares in *Sutra* 2.3.43 that "the individual souls

[151] *Ibid.*, p. 632.
[152] *Ibid.*, for instance, pp. 51, 79.
[153] *Ibid.*, p. 281.
[154] *Ibid.*, c.f. Shankara's comment on *Sutras* 2.3. 19-28.
[155] *Ibid.*, p. 348.
[156] *Ibid.*, p. 349.

are parts of God because of the mention that they are different," Shankara concedes in one sentence, ("the individual should be *a part* of God," he says, "even as a spark is of fire") only to retract in the next ("the individual is *a part only apparently*, for the partless Brahman can have no part in the literal sense").[157] Similarly, when in the *Gita* (10.42) Krishna assures Arjuna that "I stand sustaining this whole world by *one part* (of Myself)," Shankara goes along: he paraphrases Krishna as affirming "I stand sustaining firmly this whole world by one *part*, by one *limb*, by one *foot*: i.e., *one part* of Myself constitutes all beings." He even recalls for the reader the chant in *Taittiriya Aranyaka* (3.12) ("All beings form his foot"),[158] confirming this affirmation of Krishna. But then we come to 15.7 of the *Gita* when Krishna tells Arjuna that a *ray*, a *part*, of Him, becomes entangled with the senses and the mind and thus gets caught in *Prakriti*. Shankara is then asked "how can there be a *portion* of the Supreme Self who has no parts? If he has parts, he would be liable to destruction on the separation of parts." And what is Shankara's answer? "Our theory is not open to this objection," he asserts confidently, "for, it is only a portion limited by the *upadhi* set up by *avidya*, it is a portion *as it ever*, an *imaginary* portion . . . ."[159] Apart from noticing him somersault, we should notice that, once again, he has saved himself an embarrassment by taking shelter in *avidya* and its *upadhi*-s but once again he now must acknowledge that *these are real enough in themselves*, that something other than the pure undifferentiated consciousness in fact exists.

When in the *Gita* (18.61) Krishna says that "the Lord, O Arjuna, dwells in the hearts of all beings, causing all beings by His Maya to revolve, (as if) mounted on a machine," Ramanuja is triumphant, for he gets yet another passage affirming the difference between souls and Brahman.

Shankara dismisses the phrasing as being *merely the result of a habit carried over from the way ignorant people talk*, as merely reflecting the way they talk till they have realized the identity of subject and object.[160] What of the numerous passages in the Upanishads that speak of the embodied soul as circumscribed in a number of ways? Shankara's answer is unvarying: "name and form belong to the limiting adjuncts (and not to the soul)," he says, "but they are stated (in some passages) *by way of concession (to common experience)* as belonging to the soul."[161]

At one point the doubt arises that the cavity within the heart is too small a place for the infinite to reside in, how then do passages after passages declare "the spacewithin the heart" to be the residence of Brahman? The *Sutrakara* takes the easiest way out: in *Sutra* 1.2.7 he declares that the cavity in the heart is said to be the residence of Brahman only to aid meditation. This

[157] *Ibid.*, p. 507.
[158] *The Bhagvad Gita, with the Commentary of Sri Shankaracharya*, Alladi Mahadeva Sastry (tr.), Samata Books, Madras, 1977 edition, p. 276.
[159] *Ibid.*, p. 403.
[160] *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya, op. cit*, pp. 114-115.
[161] *Ibid.*, p. 287.

may be all right for the aphorist but obviously Shankara cannot stomach a give-away of this kind. He declares that the incongruity is really no defect. "While it is impossible from every point of view," he says, "to assert all-pervasiveness for something that is spatially limited, it is possible in the case of the Omnipresent One to speak of limited presence in some sense because of existence everywhere, just as a king ruling over the whole earth can be referred to as the King of Ayodhya." This is clear from the fact, he says, that the "space within the heart' is not the only residence that the Upanishads declare for Brahman. They talk of Him residing in the earth, sun, the eye, etc., too.[162] (He could have adopted the simpler dodge of just asserting that, contrary toappe arances and to what the *Sutrakara* seems to have thought, the "space within the heart" is *not* small and limited! Does *Chandogya* [8.1.3] not affirm that "the space that is within the heart *is of the same magnitude* as the space outside? Both heaven and earth are verily included within it?")

THE LIBERATING KNOWLEDGE

We have seen that Atman and Brahman are empty boxes, that it is possible to state what one wants about them and, therefore, about the relation of one to the other. As release is supposed to come from the correct knowledge about the precise relation of these two, about the exact status of the world of name and form, about reality in short, it will surprise no one that different thinkers are able to assert contrary things as to what the precise knowledge is that will release us.

Relying on texts such as "*Tat Tvam Asi*," "*Aham Brahmasmi*," etc,
Shankara says that we will be released upon realizing, upon internalizing,
non-duality, upon realizing that all is pure, undifferentiated consciousness.
Ramanuja, on the other hand, relying on texts such as "But different is the
Highest Person" (*Gita*, 15.17), "Having known the self and the mover as
separate . . ." (*Shvetashvatar*, 1.6) teaches that "it is the cognition of Brah-
man as the inward ruler *different from* the individual souls that effects the
highest goal of man, i.e., final release. . . ."[163]

THE TEXTS TOO ARE EMPTIED

We noticed first that crucial concepts as well as peripheral ones have been
emptied of content and that, therefore, it has been possible for the compilers
of the Upanishads, the *Brahma-Sutra*-s and the *Gita* to make diametrically
contradictory assertions about them. We have also seen one minor consequ-
ence of this: commentators, pledged as they are to upholding every word
that purports to be scripture, are forced to execute somersaults upon
somersaults as they run into one contradictory passage after another.

[162] *Ibid.*, pp. 116, 128.
[163] *Vedanta-Sutras with Ramanuja's Commentary*, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

The position deteriorates further. As the concepts to which the texts ostensibly pertain are empty boxes, the texts, even when they are unequivocal, come to be drained of content. It is now possible for a commentator to assert that a passage—which is unambiguous in itself—means thus and thus and for his opponent to insist that it means the opposite. Unambiguous passages too become empty boxes into which each can stuff the meaning he wants.

Once again for reasons of space I must confine myself to just a few of the numerous examples that can be cited and, for the same reason, among the scores and scores of authorities from whose works one can chose, I must confine myself to our two friends—Shankara and Ramanuja.

Relying on numerous passages of the sort that have been cited earlier in Chapter 3, Shankara asserts that the Upanishads establish Brahman to be pure, undifferentiated consciousness. When they talk of Him as "Bliss," Shankara maintains that this "bliss" is but a synonym for the pure consciousness. Ramanuja appropriates many of the same passages for his own position: they establish Brahman, he says, to be a *knower*, a knowing *subject*; consciousness is an *attribute* of His and "Bliss" is *another* attribute of His. He points to a text such as *Taittiriya* (2.7), "A flavour is He indeed; having obtained a flavour this one enjoys bliss," and on its basis asserts that "to say that anyone is identical with that by obtaining which he enjoys bliss, would be madness indeed."[164] Does the *Brihad-Aranyaka* (4.5.15), Ramanuja would say, not ask "by what should one know the *knower*?" Does the *Prashnopanishad* (4.9) not say that He is "the *knower*, the *hearer*, the *smeller*, the *taster*, the *perceiver*, the *thinker*, the *agent* . . ."?

When *Katha* 1.2.22 refers to Him as "bodiless among the bodies," Shankara takes it to mean what it seems to mean, that He is without form, without a body. But Ramanuja, pointing to many other passages that talk of souls and matter being His body, insists that the passage does not deny Him a body, it only denies of Him a body due to and embroiled in *karma*.[165] When the Upanishads speak of Brahman as "infinite" Ramanuja insists that the reference is not to His *extent*, His dimension being beyond measurement, but to the fact that He has *an infinite multitude of good qualities*.[166] Ramanuja takes the *Neti-Neti* denials to establish the same fact. In denying of Him this attribute and that the Upanishads, he maintains, are not asserting that Brahman does not have those attributes; they are only affirming that He does not have these qualities *alone*, that He has others too, that He is indeed an ocean of such qualities.[167] While Shankara takes the *Neti-neti* denials to deny all in reference to Brahman, to put Him beyond all conceivable attributes and things, Ramanuja insists that *they negative only the evil attributes*.[168]

When the Upanishads affirm that words do not reach Him, that from Him even the mind turns back, Shankara takes the passages to mean that being

164*Ibid.*, p. 236.
165*Ibid.*, p. 615.
166*Ibid.*, p. 236.
167*Ibid.*, pp. 10, 11, 615-617.
168*Ibid.*, p. 424.

formless and devoid of all the attributes which we are accustomed to associate with entities and things, He is beyond the reach of our senses and reason. Ramanuja, on the other hand, takes the passages to only affirm that the plenitude of His auspicious qualities is so vast that it cannot be encompassed by our speech, etc., or comprehended by our mind.[169]

Shankara takes passages like "That art thou" to affirm the identity of Atman and Brahman. To Ramanuja they prove the difference between the two. After all, says Ramanuja, the text uses two *separate* words "*That*" and "*thou*" and thus clearly indicates that they are not identical; "to maintain then that the word 'That' which refers back to the Brahman mentioned before—i.e., a Brahman possessing infinite attributes—should aim at conveying instructions about a substance devoid of all attributes, is unmeaning as the incoherent talk of a mad man . . ." he says.[170] Ramanuja finds confirmation for this view elsewhere also. When Krishna tells Arjuna, "It is not at all that once *I* did not exist, nor (that) *you*, nor (that) *all these* kings (did not exist at any time). And surely it is not that *all* of us shall not be existing at any time," (*Gita*, 2.12) Ramanuja is triumphant: "Thus it is seen," he says, "that the Lord Himself declares that the distinction of the souls from the Lord as well as from one another is the highest truth. For, at the time of teaching one who is bewildered by ignorance . . . (when teaching) that the fundamental reality is eternal, there is the distinct mention of 'I,' 'You,' 'these all' and 'We'."[171] Referring to the same stanza Shankara asserts the opposite: "The plural 'us'," he maintains, "is used to affirm that the *bodies* are different, not to establish that the self is more than one."[172] And does Ramanuja himself hold to his stated position consistently? Not at all. At one point he is at last face to face with the question that while many Upanishadic passages affirm a difference between the Atman and Brahman, others—much against his preference—affirm their identity. Is there no contradiction, then? No, he says, there is none. And how not? Because, he says in all seriousness, as all ideas are finally based on Brahman, we can take all words as also finally denoting Brahman.[173] But then, Mr. Ramanuja, does this rule of thumb not apply also to *Gita* (2.12) which, as we just saw, you flaunt as proving that the souls and Brahman are different on the ground that Krishna uses different words like "I," "Thou," "all of these"? Why can we not stick to Shankara's position about the identity of Atman and Brahman on the maxim that you have just laid down, namely that these distinct words "I," "Thou," "all of these" refer to the same Brahman? But such questions are not for our philosopher and guide. Rules change with the passage that one is commenting on.

When the Upanishads assert that the ether within the heart is the same

[169] *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.
[170] *The Gita-Bhashya of Ramanuja*, M.R. Sampat Kumaran, (tr), Vidya Press, Madras, 19[illegible], p. 22.
[171] *Ibid.*, pp. 13-218.
[172] *The Bhagavad Gita, with the Commentary of Sri Shankaracharya*, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
[173] *Vedanta-Sutras with Ramanuja's Commentary*, *op. cit.*, p. 718.

as the ether in the cosmos, Shankara takes them to be affirming the identity of the Atman and Brahman Ramanuja stoutly maintains that all references to Brahman residing in the heart are merely meant to help meditation,[174] that "what the text says as to the ether within the heart being as large as the universal ether is meant (not to make a conclusive statement as to its extent but only) to negative that smallness of the ether which is established by its abiding within the heart."[175] (Recalling our earlier discussion we would not expect Ramanuja, any more than Shankara, to stick to this position for any length of time; faced with *Brahma-Sutra* 1.3.13 or *Chandogya* 8.1.1 which unambiguously state that it is Brahman who dwells in the heart, we find Ramanuja himself coming perilously close to saying as much.)[176]

"All this is Brahman," say the Upanishads (for instance, *Katha*, 2.1.11, *Chandogya*, 3.14.1, *Chandogya*, 7. 25-2, *Brihad Aranyaka*, 2.4.6, *Mundaka*, 2.2.11). As they also state that Brahman is pure consciousness, Shankara concludes that in affirming that "all this is Brahman," the Upanishads are saying that all is pure consciousness, that the world of name and form is non-existent. By these statements, he maintains, they intend to deny and eliminate the Universe from the realm of the real, not to affirm its apparent heterogeneity.[177] For Ramanuja the implication is precisely the opposite. By speaking of "all this" they are, he insists, already acknowledging and affirming this wonderfully variegated Universe; he maintains that, in fact, each of the relevant passages "teaches directly that reflection on the plurality of Brahman is the cause of peace of mind."[178] In what sense then do they maintain that "all this is Brahman?" Quite simple, says Ramanuja. First, in the sense, as the *Chandogya* (3.14.1-2) tells us, "all this is but Brahman, because it *originates from* that (Brahman), *merges in* that and is *sustained* by that." Second, in the sense, as the *Chandogya* (6.8.7) also tells us, that "all this has that *as its essence*," that is as its *Inner Ruler*, as its governing principle.[179] Far from denying the varied Universe these passages, maintains Ramanuja, endow it with the highest possible reality-quotient for these very passages proclaim it, along with the souls. to be *the body of Brahman*. What could be more real than the body of Brahman Himself?[180]

But what about the "*Neti-neti*" passages? Do the Upanishads not say that Brahman alone is real and that He is "Not this, not this," that He is not the world of name and form we perceive? Do they not thereby deny the xeistence of such a world? Yes, says Shankara, "... all creation based on that Brahman is denied to be true by saying 'not so, not so.' And it is but proper that all creation should be denied by saying 'not so, not so,' since from such Upanishadic phrases as 'originating only in name' (*Chandogya*,

[174] *Ibid.*, for instance, pp. 264, 324, 326.
[175] *Ibid.*, pp. 315, 324.
[176] *Ibid.*, for instance, pp. 314, 316, 324, 326, 349, 384.
[177] *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya*, *op. cit.*, for instance, p. 161.
[178] *Vedanta-Sutras with Ramanuja's Commentary*, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-5, 93, 133.
[179] *Ibid.*, for instance, pp. 84-85, 96-97, 132, 134, 217, 353.
[180] *Ibid.*, pp. 133, 227.

6.1.4) creation is known to be unreal . . . ."[181] Not at all, says Ramanuja. The '*Neti-Neti*' passages do not mean that the world does not exist, only that Brahman is *not just this world but this world and more*; they do not mean that nothing other than Brahman exists, only that Brahman is different in nature from entities other than Him that are known to exist. "In the clause 'not so, not so'," he tells us, "the 'so' refers back to the world as established by other means of proof, and the clause thus declares that Brahman who is the Self of all is not different in nature from the world. This is confirmed by the subsequent passage, 'He is incomprehensible, for He is not comprehended, He is undecaying . . .,' which means—as He is different in nature from what is comprehended by the other means of proof, He is not grasped by those means: as He is different from what suffers decay, He does not decay and so on. . . ."[182]

But what of passages in the Upanishads that address Brahman and proclaim "Thou alone art real"? Do they not thereby proclaim the unreality of the world? Precisely, says Shankara. Not at all, says Ramanuja. Through these passages the Upanishads merely teach us that "as Brahman is the Self of the world, the latter *viewed apart from Brahman* is not real. . . ." If they thought the world to be unreal why would they address Brahman as "The lord of the world"?[183]

But do the Upanishads not directly deny plurality? Does the *Brihad-Aranyaka* (4.4.19) not warn, "There is no plurality here; from death to death goes he who sees any plurality"? Does *Sutra* 3.2.36 in the *Brahma-Sutra*-s not recall "the denial of everything else (apart from Brahman)"? But these texts, says Ramanuja, are only denying any governing principle, any inner self other than Brahman; they are only affirming that the world is one in that it is in its entirety an effect of Brahman. Its reality and manifoldness are affirmed, Ramanuja adds, in numerous passages that speak of the desire of Brahman to be *many*.[184]

But then what do the Upanishads mean when, having established Brahman as pure consciousness, they proclaim that "He is without a second"? They mean, says Ramanuja, not that nothing other than Him exists, that nothing other than pure consciousness exists but that there is no causal principle, no ruling principle other than Him.[185]

But do they not specifically deny all difference? Does the *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad* (4 4.19) not specifically say, "there is no difference whatever in it"? As It alone exists and as It is undifferentiated, how can this varied world of name and form be said to exist? Ramanuja is unmoved. The purpose of passages such as these, he maintains, is not to deny the existence of other objects; it is merely to warn us that these varied objects other than Brahman—like gods, etc.—should not be the objects of meditation for they

[181] *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya*, *op. cit.*, p. 626.
[182] *Vedanta-Sutras with Ramanuja's Commentary*, *op. cit.*, p. 663.
[183] *Ibid.*, p. 94-95.
[184] *Ibid.*, pp. 80, 101 etc.
[185] *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85, 96-97, 353.

get sublated upon deeper probing. The error against which the Upanishads warn us, says Ramanuja, does not consist in thinking that these varied objects exist but in thinking that they are Brahman: "a declaration that the appearance of mother of pearl as silver is founded on error surely does not imply that all the silver in the world is unreal . . . ."[186] In fact, when, for instance, *Sutra* 4.2 3 notes that things seen in a dream (which get sublated upon waking) differ from things seen in the waking state (which do not), it is only, Ramanuja reminds us, affirming the reality of the latter.[187]

But what do the Upanishads mean when they say that "When He is known all is known"? How could all be known upon merely knowing Him, unless He alone is? Does the *Chandogya* (6.1.4) not teach, "O, amiable one, as by knowing a lump of earth, all things made of earth become known, since earth alone is true and all transformations exist only in name having speech as their support . . . ."?[188] Does the *Brahma-Sutra* (2.3.6) not state that this affirmation "can remain unaffected only if all the effects are non-different from Brahman," *i.e.*, it can be true only if all is pure consciousness? Does the *Sutra* not go on to inform us, "and this is confirmed by Vedic texts"? Ramanuja has little difficulty in providing not just one but three answers. First, he says, when the Upanishads tell us that "all is known when He is known," they state the obvious—after all, as all things and souls constitute the body of Brahman, when Brahman is known in its entirety (*i e.*, when we come to know Its essence as well as Its body), naturally we come to know whatever there is to be known about all the other things too.[189] Second, to know a thing, he says, is to know its inner, its governing principle. As Brahman is the Inner Self, the governing principle of every thing, to know It is to know everything. Third, when the Upanishads proclaim in effect to be the same as the cause they, he maintains in contrast to Shankara's literal interpretation, are only talking of the similarity of essential characteristics, they are only maintaining that the oil could not have come out of sand (with which it does not share the relevant essential characteristics) but only out of oil-seeds (with which it does); they are not maintaining that the oil and the oil-seeds are absolutely identical in every adventitious as well as essential attribute.[190]

But then do the Upanishads not often refer to the world of name and form as *Maya*, as an illusion born out of ignorance? How is one to maintain the reality of the world in the face of these passages? Simple, says Ramanuja, the word *Maya* does not mean what Shankara says it means. It does not mean that a thing is illusory, that it is non-existent. It only means that it is *perishable*, that it is mutable: when the rope is perceived as a snake, the snake is unreal as it is sublated when the rope is seen for what it is; the

[186] *Ibid* , p. 86. [187] *Ibid.*, p. 86.

[188] See also, for instance, *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, 4.5.6.

[189] *Vedanta-Sutra-s with Ramanuja's Commentary*, *op. cit.*, for instance, pp. 132, 135, 229, 230.

[190] For the two contrary interpretations see the comments of Shankara and Ramanuja on *Sutra*-s 2.1. 15-19 which affirm that the cause and effect are no different.

rope, on the other hand, is real, Diversity is real because, unlike things perceived in a dream, it is not sublated in the waking state. It is in this sense, Ramanuja maintains, that the Upanishads speak of Brahman alone as real and of everything else as *Maya*, in the sense that everything else perishes, it is subject to change while Brahman alone is immutable.

This may be a clever construction upon the word (and it is much favoured by commentators like Tilak) but it surely does not square with the Upanishads. Consider the similies that they give for the world: the horn of a hare, the son of a barren woman, the light of lamps painted in pictures, the hair of a tortoise . . . . Is it that the son of a barren woman is "unreal" in the sense that like all humans he is "mortal" or "subject to change"? Or is he unreal in the sense that *he does not exist?* In fact, the similies imply more, do they not? It is not just that the son of a barren women *does* not exist but that he *cannot* exist. It is not just that the son of a barren woman does not as yet exist but that *as soon as we* know that the woman is barren *we know from that very fact* that she cannot have a son.

Let us leave Ramanuja and move on.

THE BRAHMA-SUTRAS

This practice of stuffing meaning into passages and words reaches farcical limits in the case of the *Brahma-Sutra*-s. These *Sutra*-s are 554 telegraphic aphorisms. In fact, most of them are telegraphic aphorisms with the key-words missing. Commenting on them is, therefore, a free-for-all. Each side can appropriate them by four devices. First, it can choose the key-word that has to be inserted in a particular aphorism and thus determine, for instance, what subject the aphorism is talking about. Second, even when the subject that is being talked about is clear, the discussant can choose his stance about the precise import of the aphorism. Third, given the wide disagreement in the basic texts—the Upanishads—which these aphorisms are supposed to summarize and clarify, each discussant when confronted with an aphorism is free to decide whether in stating a particular view the aphorist is affirming the truth or is merely stating a view that is to be refuted later. Finally, when confronted with a *Sutra* that is unambiguous (an infrequent occurrence in the first place) the disputant is free to decide whether the words used in the aphorism are to be taken literally or metaphorically, whether, to use a favourite expression of Shankara and of Ramanuja, they are to be taken in their primary sense or in their secondary sense.

It would require a fair-sized volume to document the resulting melange of assertions in detail. I must leave this as an instructive exercise for the reader and confine myself to recalling a couple of illustrations about each of the ways in which discrepant interpretations arise.

The subject-matter of an aphorism: Consider *Sutra*-s 3.2.27, 28. They read as follows: "*But since both are mentioned, as between a snake and its coil. Or both are like light and its source, being effulgence.*" Now, the first question is—what is it that the *Sutra*-s are talking about? It is clear that they are talk-

ing about two entities and they seem to be saying that these two entities have the same relationship, one to the other as a snake has to its coil or as light to its source. But what are the two entities? Doesn't the context provide the answer? Can't one look up the preceding and succeeding *Sutra*-s and decide what the *Sutrakara* is talking about?" you wonder. But the preceding and succeeding *Sutra*-s are equally taciturn. The consequence, therefore, is that Shankara takes the *Sutras* to be spelling out the relation between Brahman and the *soul* while Ramanuja takes them to be spelling out the relation between Brahman and the *empirical universe*! Similarly, in *Sutras* 1.1.12-19 (1.1.13-20, in the Thibaut edition) Shankara takes the question at issue to be whether an entity referred to as "the Blissful One" is Brahman or not while Ramanuja takes the topic to be the difference between Brahman and the individual soul.

This is not all. The import of the analogies too is not unambiguous. Consider *Sutra*-s 3.2.27, 28 which were cited above. When the *Sutra*-s state that the relationship of the two entities is that of the snake and its coil or of light and its source, are they affirming that the two entities are different or that they are not different? Shankara, committed as he is to deducing the non-difference of the soul and Brahman from every passage, implies that the *Sutra*-s are more or less saying that the two entities being talked about are not really different, one from the other: "from the mention of both difference and non-difference (in the Upanishads), the reality must be like the snake and its coil," he says, "As in the illustration, the snake in itself is non-different, but it differs in its having a coil, or a hood or an extended posture, so also is the case here (with Brahman). . . . Or this is to be understood on the analogy of light and its substratum. Just as the sunlight and its substratum, the sun, are luminous, and not entirely different, both being equally effulgent, and yet they are thought of as different, similar is the case here."[191] Ramanuja, on the other hand, is equally determined to show that every passage affirms the difference between Brahman, the sentient and separate souls and the non-sentient and varied matter, the latter two being the body of the former. Having decided that the *Sutra*-s are talking of Brahman and non-sentient matter, he says that his position is precisely the one that the *Sutra*-s are affirming: "all non-sentient things," he says the *Sutra* shows, are just "special forms or arrangements of Brahman, as the coils are of a coiled-up snake or of a coiled-up rope," or that they are like "light and that in which it abides *i.e.*, the luminous body. The two are different, but at the same time they are identical in so far as they are both fire. In the same way the non-sentient world constitutes the form of Brahman."[192]

Even when commentators are able to agree as to what it is that a particular *Sutra* is talking about, the reading of each regarding the import of the *Sutra* can be poles apart. *Sutra* 1.1.31 (1.1. 32 in Thibaut's edition) pro-

[191] *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya, op. cit.*, pp. 630-631.
[192] *Vedanta-Sutras with Ramanuja's Commentary, op. cit.*, pp. 618-620.

vides a handy illustration. Here, in accordance with Shankara's commentary, is Gambhirananda's paraphrase of the *Sutra*: "*If it be argued that Brahman is not spoken of here on account of the indications of the individual soul and the chief vital force, then that cannot be so, since this will lead to a threefold meditation. (Besides, Prana) is accepted (elsewhere) as meaning Brahman (because of the presence of Brahman's characteristics), (and these are in evidence here.)*" And here is the transliteration from Ramanuja's text: "*If it be said (that Brahman is not meant) on account of the characteristic marks of the individual soul and the chief vital air, we say no, on account of the threefoldness of meditation; on account of (such threefold meditation) being met (in other texts also), and on account of (such threefold meditation) being appropriate here (also).*"

The first thing that will strike the reader is that our two commentators take the latter half of the *Sutra* to be talking of entirely different subjects—Ramanuja takes the latter half to be referring to the threefold meditation which formed the subject-matter of the first half of the *Sutra* while Shankara takes it to refer to *Prana*, the chief vital force, which too is mentioned in the first half of the *Sutra* and which, on his reading, was the subject of the preceding three *Sutras*. But I have already alluded to these discrepancies. Consider now the precise significance of the reference to the threefold meditation. First, Shankara and Ramanuja do not agree as to what three entities are the subjects in the threefold meditation. Shankara takes the reference to be to Brahman, the souls and *Prana* while Ramanuja takes it to be to, "Brahman in itself as the cause of the entire world; Brahman as having for its body the totality of the enjoying (individual) souls and Brahman as having for its body the objects and means of enjoyment." Second, they draw opposite inferences from the fact that if the particular interpretation of the text that the *Sutra* is alluding to is adopted it leads to a threefold meditation: Ramanuja says that precisely because it leads to the threefold meditation (and hence confirms the difference between Brahman, the souls and non-sentient matter) the interpretation *should* be adopted while Shankara implies that the interpretation should *not* be adopted precisely because, if adopted, it will lead to the threefold meditation and thus implicitly legitimize a difference between the threefold entities, a difference that in his view just does not exist.[193]

The third uncertainty (that is whether in a particular *Sutra* the *Sutra-Kara* is affirming the truth or merely stating the *purvapaksha* view that is to be refuted elsewhere) can be illustrated by *Sutra*-s 2.3.26-32 which imply that the sentience of the souls differs from the souls themselves or by *Sutra*-s 2.3.43-50 which clearly imply that the soul is different from Brahman. The reader can be reasonably confident that Ramanuja will make much of these *Sutra*-s and take them as affirming the truth while Shankara will be at pains to skirt around their obvious meaning and to imply that the views are

[193]Contrast *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya*, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-107 and *Vedanta-Sutras with Ramanuja's Commentary*, *op. cit.*, pp. 253-254.

merely being stated for comprehensiveness and will be refuted elsewhere.

Illustrations of how inconvenient words and passages are dismissed by assertions that the particular word or passage has to be taken in its "secondary sense" and not in its "primary sense" are so numerous that I shall cite just one or two illustrations (these too only in the next chapter) and leave the task of locating additional instances as an easy exercise for the reader.

"But are you not making too much of differences in interpretations? After all, these are very difficult subjects—don't forget that we are talking here about the ultimate nature of reality—and differences are bound to arise."

But when the spectrum of answer is so wide as to cover almost every position—"yes," "no," "may be," "neither 'yes', nor 'no', nor 'may be'," " 'yes', as well as 'no', as well as 'may be' "—then what is the information content of the teaching of our seers and commentators taken as a whole? In what sense can we say, as we are apt to do *ad nauseum*, that they have successfully uncovered the ultimate secret?

THE VERBAL VOMIT

After a while even this effort of stuffing meaning into the empty boxes is abandoned. Mere repetition takes over. The repetition is deliberately interminable—so that by the end of the passage or the ritual the devotee has, by the mere act of reading and reciting it, carted the notion into his head. Even though the reader may by now have wearied of reading a seemingly endless number of passages he just must wade through, wade through and not float over, the following representative passages to realize how, on occasion, the texts we continue to hold in such superstitious reverence give up even the pretence of saying something meaningful. First we have parts of two precise descriptions of Brahman:

> What is (apparently) of the form of all causes and effects, (that) alone assumes, (simultaneously with the dawning of the knowledge of the truth), the form of indivisible, palpable sentience and bliss, (becomes) intensely radiant and auspicious in aspect, (becomes) a distinct heap of intense radiance of the character of exceedingly unalloyed bliss, (becomes) immobile like a pillar of palpable sentience, that is full in all respects and infinite, (becomes) possessed of the distinct aspect of pure, perceptible bliss, (becomes) possessed of the aggregate aspect of the glory and the power of infinite sentience, (becomes) possessed of the distinct aspect of uncommon bliss and marvellous radiance, and (becomes) also possessed of the aspect of a multitude of beautiful lightning-flashes generating infinite and plentiful bliss. The form of the Brahman, which is peerless, indivisible and blissful, has been demonstrated as possessed of the aforesaid aspects. . . .[194]

[194] *Tripad-Vibhuti-Maha-Narayanopanishad*, IV. 1.

One should meditate upon *Adinarayana*, firmly established in that *yantra*, in the interior of a heap of radiance of unsurpassed bliss, that is beyond the range of verbal expression, who is the embodiment of the bliss (of the *Paramatman*) manifest as of the essence of sentience, who is of the real form of sentience and bliss, who is the ocean of unsurpassed beauty, who is of the real form of the *Turya* and of the *Turiyatita* (transcending the *Turya*) of non-dual, exquisite bliss, who is the ocean of unsurpassed beauty and uninterrupted bliss of the intense *Turya*, who is bright like the undulating flash of lightning reflected on the waters of the stream of beauty and is the embodiment of divine radiance and auspiciousness, served by various types of exquisite auspiciousness that have assumed corporeal forms, who is adorned with countless jewels shining with the brilliance of infinite crores of suns of sentience and bliss, who is well served by multitudinous weapons of various kinds. . . donning the *Kaustubha* (jewel) and garlands of wild flowers over-filled with bliss, due to the showers of nectar-like flowers falling from the Brahman-like forests of *Kalpaka* trees respectively, ever full of bliss and intensely auspicious owing to the countless showers of the essence of the Brahman, resplendent with the prodigious umbrella of the multitude of the ten-thousand hoods of *Adishesa*, with his body shining brilliantly with the lustre of the myriads of gems embedded in the capacious hood of *Adishesa*, and magnified by cascades of radiance flowing from the limbs of *Adishesa*, who is of the real form of the unsurpassed fragrance of the Brahman, who is of the special aspect of the fragrance of the unsurpassed bliss of the Brahman, who is of the special aspect of the totality of the infinite fragrance of the Brahman, who is ever fresh with *Tulasi*-garlands of infinite bliss, who is ever resplendent with countless garlands of flowers of sentience and bliss, who is effulgent with waves of radiance setting on in endless succession, who is perpetually shining with eddies of unique radiance, unsurpassed and infinite, enveloping Him, whose natural beauty is enhanced by the rows of incense-burners and lamps of sentience and bliss waved in front of Him, who is served on all sides by *Chamara* fans of specially unsurpassed bliss, whose beauty is all the more heightened by the bunches of fruits of sentience, innumerable, unsurpassingly large, matchless and closely packed. (placed in front of Him), whose environment is imposing in appearance, because of the rows of celestial towers, umbrellas and flags displayed all about Him, all of sentience and bliss, whose presence is ever lustrous with flares of countless torches, celestial and exquisitely auspicious, who is immersed in a halo of intense radiance beggaring description, who is the *Turya* of the character of the *Ardhamatra*. . . .[195]

Next we have a part of an equally precise account of the journey to the Brahman-world:

[195] *BU.*, VII. 50.

Thereafter, there shines forth the *Sri Tulasi-Vaikunthapura*, which is highly auspicious, endowed with endless glory, of the aspect of an immeasurable heap of radiance aggregating the infinite heaps of radiance of the Brahman, having on all sides many quadrangles specially filled with sentience and bliss, and situated on the summit of the mountain of immeasurable sentience and bliss, rendered fertile with floods of the river of sentience and bliss, adored with countless mounds planted with the sacred *Tulasi* of unsurpassed bliss, the holiest of all the holy places, inhabited everywhere by countless numbers of the eternally emancipated (*Jivanmukta*-s) of the form of sentience, beautified by endless rows of towers of bliss and of the special character of celestial radiance, in the interior of a heap of immeasurable radiance.

Having entered the *Tulasi-Vaikuntha* of the aforesaid character and meditated on the beautiful *Tulasi*, the companion of Sri (the spouse of Vishnu), established on the celestial tower situated within that (*Vaikuntha*), frolicking on all the limbs of the all-full *Mahavishnu*, presiding over with unsurpassed grace and beauty as the guardian deity, served by countless numbers of ever-faithful servants in the aforesaid manner and likewise meditating on Lakshmi in the same manner, after duly making circumambulations and salutation, paying homage with the various marks of respect prescribed therefor, singing special hymns in praise of her, being worshipped in turn by her and others abiding there taking leave of them all and proceeding onwards further and further, reaching the banks of the river *Paramananda-Tarangini*, rippling with exquisite bliss, having a view of the innumerable *Vaikuntha* of pure sentience and bliss situated there on all sides round, attaining unsurpassed bliss therefrom, being worshipped by the ancient *Purusha*-s of the form of sentience abiding there, thence moving further and further onwards right through the *Brahmavana* s, through radiant and auspicious temples, with showers emitting celestial fragrance and bliss, across oceans of the bliss of immortality of an unsurpassed character, and of heaps of immeasurable radiance, boisterous with forest-like billows, thence through the ranges of mountains of bliss, with countless multitudes of towers of pure sentience (situated on their slopes and summits), the *Upasaka*, moving thence onwards further and further, through serried rows of towers and ranges of mountains of infinite radiance, reaching them all in the aforesaid order and also the junction of the *Vidya* and *Ananda*-quarters, bathing there in the waters of the *Ananda-Tarangini*, the river of bliss, reaching the forest of sentience and bliss, the forest of the character of pure sentience and exquisite bliss enshrouded by perennial showers of nectar-like flowers, watered on all sides by streams of exquisite bliss, exceedingly mirthful, because of the high festivals that have assumed a palpable shape, bearing the aspect of the ocean of indivisible bliss, with mountains of mirth and bliss looming on all sides round, in the middle of which the *Suddha-bodhananda-vaikuntha* (of pure sentience and bliss), which is identically the same as the *Vaikuntha* of the *Brahmavidya*-quarter, resplendent

with thousands of quadrangles of bliss, shines forth brilliantly, crowded with multitudes of towers of infinite bliss ever resplendent, on all sides with special terraces of infinite sentience, beautified with innumerable halls specially intended for diversion, decorated with countless, highly beautiful umbrellas, flags, fly-flaps (made of bushy tails of the *Chamara*-deer), canopies and festoons, with an exceedingly blissful phalanx of the eternally emancipated (*jivanmukta*-s) arrayed in all directions, of the aspect of the aggregate of countless mountains of celestial radiance, of the form of a circle of heaped-up radiance of the bliss of the Brahman beyond the range of verbal utterance, of a circle of indivisible radiance of a special character, of a circle of the aggregate of pure bliss of a special character, peculiarly of the character of indivisible palpable sentience and bliss. . . .[196]

And, finally, we have parts of a description of the seat of Brahman:

That eternal radiance, indicative of exquisite bliss, that is non-differentiated, infinite, and transcendent, shines forth in perpetuity. In the region within that (radiance, which is non-dual), there is the mountain of immeasurable, blissful, sentience, characterized by indivisible, exquisite bliss, intensely radiant with sentience and bliss, the abode of eternal prosperity, the essence of sentience extracted by churning sentience (differentiated as the *Vishva*, the *Viraj*, the *Otr* and the like), the ocean of a infinite wonder, the distinct radiance immersed in a heap of immeasurable radiance, adorned with innumerable streams of bliss, of the aspect of an ocean of unsurpassed bliss, a heap of radiance that may be distinctly characterized as matchless, eternal, faultless, unsurpassed and limitless, adorned with a thousand quadrangles of unsurpassed bliss, beautified with distinct rows of palatial mansions of pure sentience, resplendent with countless pleasure-gardens filled with sentience and bliss, outspread on all sides round with perennial showers of flowers. That alone is the seat known as the *Tripad-Vibhuti-Vaikuntha*, (which is the abode of the glory of the *Tripad Brahman*). . . . That alone is the distinctly palpable pure sentience, which is of the real form of the deity presiding over the indivisible, blissful sentience of the Brahman. (That alone is) the abode of all (abiding in all), the playground of the non-dual *Parabrahman*, the region of the halo of radiance that is unsurpassed bliss, the region of the supreme seat of the transcendent Brahman, which is indicated by non-dual transcendent bliss, the special region of the exquisite embodiment of transcendent, unsurpassed bliss, the region devoted to the totality of the supreme embodiment of the infinite (Brahman), the region specially characterized by the display of the transcendent aggregate glory of infinite knowledge and bliss, the region specially characterized by the aggregate glory of the display of infinite sentience, the special image of the

[196] *Ibid.*, VI. 22-23.

exclusive embodiment of indivisible, pure sentience, the special embodiment of infinite, pure sentience that is beyond the range of articulate expression, the aggregate aspect of oceans of infinite bliss, traversed by infinite mountains of sentience, by countless mountains of sentience and bliss, that is of the aggregate aspect of all that is distinctly unsurpassed bliss and exquisite auspiciousness, that is the transcendent radiance rolled into a mass of the supreme embodiment of the *Parabrahman* indicated by indivisible, non-dual and exquisite bliss, the region of the sun of the form of exquisite sentience, that is super-imposed upon by the thirty-two different formations. The distinct formations are: the twenty-four made up of *Keshava* and others, the *Nyasamantra*-s of *Sudrashana* and others, extracted out of the *Sudrashana* and other *Yantra*-s, *Ananta*, *Garuda*, and *Vishvaksena* and also unsurpassed bliss. . . . In the middle of the *Anandavyuha*, is the palace of sentience, which is a thousand crores of *Yojana*-s in height and extent, presenting an auspicious appearance, with a crore of towers of the bliss of the Brahman, crowded with countless multitude of pleasure-gardens, breathing the import of countless Upanishads, resonant with the crackling of the swans of the form of the *Sama-veda*, adorned with countless minarets of bliss, traversed on all sides by torrents of the essence of sentience and bliss, situated in the interior of a heap of radiance of indivisible bliss and is a veritable ocean of infinite bliss and wonder. In the interior of that (palace) there shines forth a power of the name of *Pranava*, with a brilliance surpassing the splendour of countless crores of suns and indicative of unsurpassed bliss. It flares up with a hundred crores of minarets of bliss. Inside that (tower) there shines over the summit of sentience and bliss the hall dedicated to the *Ashtaksari* (eight-syllabled *mantra*). In the middle of that hall is an open quadrangle of sentience and bliss, adorned with a pleasure-garden of bliss. Over that flares aloft a heap of radiance of unsurpassed bliss. . . .[197]

Is all this revelation? Is it knowledge? Is it even reportage? Or is it just the verbal vomit?

IS THE DEVIL GREEN OR IS HE YELLOW?

Thus far I have dealt with two consequences of the fact that concepts which are central as well as peripheral to the tradition are empty boxes—the fact that the texts themselves are drained of meaning and the fact that any com-

mentator who keeps his nose close to the Upanishadic guides is led to contradict himself, to somersault again and again.

I shall now illustrate a third consequence of the emptiness of the boxes. And this is that because of the non-falsifiability of basic concepts, debates can seldom be resolved, that they go on and on leading to school-mongering in philosophy, to sect-mongering in religion, that the debates too have as little substance as the concepts themselves, that they are, indeed, as Lenin would say, debates between those who maintain that the Devil is yellow and those who insist that he is green.

I shall illustrate this matter by listing a few questions that were hotly debated by our seers as well as the answers that these seers found. The list is merely illustrative and can be extended many times over. The reader as he races through the questions and answers should keep a tally on three matters: he should continually ask himself, "what is the social relevance of this question"; second, he should notice the wide variety of answers that the seers reached and ask himself, "if all of these widely differing answers are equally admissible then in what sense can we claim that our seers found *the* answer, that they glimpsed *the* great secret"; third, he should keep track of the ways in which our seers debate matters, the props they rely on, the devices they use to sustain their point.

On with the questions, then.

Let us begin with creation itself. *Could Pradhana, primordial nature, have created this orderly Universe on its own, could it have endowed it with design and purpose*? This may seem a trivial or unimportant question to us. But it is precisely the sort of question on which major controversies raged among our seers and philosophers. The *Brahma-Sutra*-s themselves have to go to great lengths to establish that indeed it is Brahman that the Upanishads talk of as the Creator of the Universe and not *Pradhana*. Now, on what does the matter turn? It turns on two questions. The first of these is: "Can a non-sentient entity acquire the desire or will to create, can it endow entities or a process with design and purpose?" The Upanishads think not but they do not go beyond some household similies in arguing the matter out. But let us for the moment go along with them. The second question now is: "Is *Pradhana* sentient or non-sentient?" For even if all had agreed that only a sentient entity is capable of having a desire to create, etc., it is clear that *Pradhana* could still be the Creator provided we take it to be sentient. And who is to say? The *Sankhya*-s say it *is* sentient while Shankara and his followers insist it is *not*. But what does endowing sentience to something you have called "Brahman" and denying it to something you have called "*Pradhana*" solve or prove or explain? It certainly does not "prove" that "Brahman, therefore, created the Universe." For *you* are the one who has endowed sentience to a word—"Brahman"—by your initial assertion.

Or consider another matter: in everyday life we observe that one needs materials before one can create something. But the Upanishads have themselves told us that in the beginning Brahman was alone, a formless undifferentiated consciousness. The question that

"*Can Brahman create the Universe without materials?*" The ways in which the question is settled in favour of Brahman are indeed typical of the tradition. First, we are told that indeed He can do so, for the Upanishads tell us that He can. Does the *Taittiriyopanishad* (2 1.1) not tell us "That created Itself by Itself"? Next come the ubiquitous analogies: "If it be said," says *Sutra* 2.1.24 from among the *Brahma-Sutra*-s, "that (Brahman) cannot be the cause since (in everyday life) one is noticed to require materials (for the production of an object) then we say, no, for it is possible on the analogy of milk." What does the "analogy of milk" signify? "As in the world," says Shankara while explaining the *Sutra*, "milk or water gets transformed into curds or ice *by itself* without depending on any extraneous accessory, so it can be here as well." This is the typical procedure—a question is settled by an analogy which is obviously imperfect. The adversary persists: "Even when milk, etc., turn into curds, etc., they have to depend *on external factors* such as heat, etc. So how can the argument (as to whether Brahman can or cannot create without materials) be settled by saying, 'for it is possible on the analogy of milk?' " Shankara's way out is the typical one—the analogy having failed, he takes shelter under the definition of Brahman. Has He not been defined as being capable of accomplishing whatever He wills? The objection, he says, "creates no difficulty," "for whichever may be the transformation and whatever its extent, it is milk alone that undergoes that modification, while heat, etc., *merely accelerate* the process. If it had not any intrinsic capacity to turn into curds, then it could not have been forcibly transformed into curds even by heat, etc.; for neither air nor space can be forced by heat, etc., to become curds. An accession of paraphernalia only perfects the capacity of milk. Brahman, however, *is possessed of the fullest power and It has not to depend on anything else for imparting an excellence* (to that power). . . . Hence," Shankara concludes, "even though Brahman is one, it is possible for It, by virtue of the possession of diverse powers, to be transformed variously on the analogy of milk. etc."[198] Thus the "argument" is as follows: we know that Brahman can create without the help of materials because He has, by definition, the power to accomplish whatever He wants without materials!

The final argument in favour Brahman's ability to create without materials is even more typical. It is contained in the next *Sutra* (2.1.26): "*Also (Brahman can create without extraneous help) like gods and others (as is seen) in this world.*" So, one non-verifiable proposition—that Brahman can create without materials—is held proven on the basis of another non-verifiable proposition—that "gods" can create without materials! And who, pray, are the "*others*" who are seen *in this world to create without materials?* Shankara is helpful and well-informed as usual. "The spider also creates its threads by itself," he says, "the crane conceives without mating by hearing merely the roar of the clouds, and the lotus stalk moves from one lake to another without waiting for any vehicles. *Similarly Brahman,*

[198]*Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya*, op. cit., pp. 350-351.

conscious though It is, may well create the Universe by Itself without looking for external means. . . ."[199]

Having settled this vital matter to their satisfaction our philosophers now tackle the next, equally weighty, question: "All right, let us say Brahman can create without materials, but He is bodiless, He has no limbs. Can He create without limbs?" The answer follows the same course. He most definitely can, says *Sutra* 2.1.31, for "*this has been explained* (*earlier*)." And what has been explained earlier? The allusion is to *Sutra*-s 2.1.27 and 2.1.28. In *Sutra* 2.1 27 we are given the "proof" which by now must have become familiar: "*But* (*this has to be accepted*) *on the authority of the Upanishads; for Brahman is known from the Upanishads alone.*" After all, does the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* (3.19) not tell us, "He sees without eyes. He hears without ears. He grasps without hands. He hastens without feet"? Where then is the difficulty in His creating without organs? "That for which the sacred word is the only means of Knowledge," pronounces Ramanuja, "and which is different from all other things, is capable of producing those effects also of the instrumental means of which it is destitute."[200] Next the gods, once again, come to the rescue of Brahman. Brahman can create without organs, says *Sutra* 2.1.28, just as the gods can with their manifold powers!

This practice of "proving" propositions in a circular manner is not confined to peripherals. The eternity and authority of the *Shruti* itself rest on a similarly circular argument. The scriptures, we are told, are unquestionable because they emanate from Brahman. But how do we know that they emanate from Brahman? From the fact that the scriptures themselves tell us that He is their source (does the *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad* [2.4.10] not tell us, for instance, "Those that are called *Rig-veda* [etc.] are but the exhalation of this great being"?) and scriptures are the valid means of knowledge! "Being possessed of all good qualities as they are," says Shankara, "they cannot possibly emerge from any source other than the all-knowing one."[201] But then how do we know that He is indeed so knowledgeable as to exhale these scriptures. O, He is omniscient because He is the source of the scriptures! The two senses in which *Sutra* 1.1.3. may be interpreted presents this circularity succinctly. The aphorism is "*Shaastryonitvaat.*" Its first rendering is: "(*Brahman is omniscient*) *because of* (*Its*) *being the source of the scriptures.*" The second rendering is: "(*Brahman is known from the scriptures alone*) *since the scriptures are the valid means of Its knowledge.*"[202] Thus Brahman is omniscient because the scriptures have emanated from Him and the scriptures are valid because they have emanated from an Omniscient Being! We know Brahman to be omniscient because the scriptures say He is omniscient and we know the scriptures to be a valid means of knowledge because they have emanated from the Omniscient One!

[199] *Ibid.*, p. 352. Ramanuja's discussion on the matter is identical, see *Vedanta-Sutras with Ramanuja's Commentary*, *op. cit.*, pp. 471-473.

[200] *Vedanta-Sutras with Ramanuja's Commentary*, *op. cit.*, p. 476.

[201] *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya*, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

[202] *Ibid* , 18-20; *Vedanta-Sutras with Ramanuja's Commentary*, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-174.

But let us get back to the questions that our seers have debated.

All are agreed that the knowledge of Brahman is the highest boon. The question now is: "*can gods also acquire this supreme knowledge, are they equipped to acquire it*?" As each can maintain what he will about the wherewithal that "gods" possess, it is hardly surprising that views about their ability to learn all there is about Brahman differ. *Sutra*-s 1.3.26 and 33 inform us that according to the great preceptor Badarayana they can. *Sutra*-s 1.3.31 and 32, on the other hand, inform us that according to the equally great preceptor Jaimini they cannot.[203]

"*Do the circumstances and manner of one's death determine one's subsequent fate or is this determined solely by one's deeds during one's life-time*?" As here is another non-verifiable matter, we can be certain of an endless and unresolved debate. Krishna in the *Gita* is emphatic that the time and circumstances of death do determine one's subsequent fate:

> Now, in what time departing *Yogin*-s go to return not, as also to return, that time will I tell thee. O, chief of the Bharatas. Fire, light, day-time, the bright fortnight, the six months of the northern solstice, then departing, men who know Brahman reach Brahman. Smoke, night-time, and the dark fortnight, the six months of the southern solstice, attaining by these to the lunar light, the *Yogin* returns. These bright and dark paths of the world are verily deemed eternal; by one a man goes to return not, by the other he returns again. Knowing these paths, O, son of Pritha, no *Yogin* is deluded. . . .[204]

It is with this sort of teaching in mind that Bhishma in the *Mahabharata* is said to have delayed his death till the sun had commenced its northern course.

But then come the *Brahma-Sutra*-s. *Sutra*-s 4.2.18-21 (to which we shall return again a little later) clearly state the opposite—the soul, we are told, gets the results of knowledge "even when departing during the sun's southern course." The author of the *Brahma-Sutra*-s is emphatic in rejecting the *Gita* on this point: discussing the relevant propositions in the *Gita* he says (*Sutra* 4.2.21) "and these times, etc., are mentioned in the *Smriti* for the *Yogin*-s: and these (paths of) *Samkhya* and *yoga* are mentioned in the *Smriti and not in the Vedas*." There goes the *Gita* with its celebrated division between *Jnana* and *Karma yoga*! (The same *Sutrakara* will lean on the *Smriti* to buttress his argument on other occasions!)

In the face of all this, what is poor Shankara to do? In his commentary on the *Gita* he follows the *Gita* and in his commentary on the *Brahma-Sutra*-s

[203] This difference of opinion naturally occasions much debate among later commentators; see *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya*, *op. cit.*, pp. 204-229, and *Vedanta-Sutras with Ramanuja's Commentary*, *op. cit.*, pp. 326-339.

[204] *Gita*, 8. 23-27.

he follows the *Brahma-Sutra*-s![205] But then what about Bhishma? Why did he delay dying? Did he not know, as the author of the *Brahma-Sutra*-s certainly seems to have known, that Krishna's teaching on this point is inconsequential? Shankara is at his evasive best: "As for Bhishma waiting for departure during the northern course," he explains, "it was by way of showing respect to popular sentiment and demonstrating the validity of his father's born that his death would be at his own command!"[206]

Ramanuja is even more deft. He dismisses this discrepancy between the *Gita* and the *Brahma-Sutra*-s by the simplest of devices. The *Gita's* stanzas about the time of death influencing one's subsequent fate, he asserts, should not be interpreted to refer to the *time* of death at all for "here the word '*time*' has the implied meaning of a *path*. . . ."[207] That's that: the contradiction arose merely because you took Krishna to mean "time" when He said "time"!

Tilak is thrown into a bit of a quandary. He is committed to upholding everything in the *Gita*, so he cannot ignore or reject these stanzas. On the other hand, if he accepts them literally, some may take them to imply that the time of one's death will free one from rebirth *irrespective of one's deeds*. How will he then derive his "energistic" path from the *Gita*? And then there is the ambiguity Ramanuja has latched on to, about whether the verses refer to the *time* of one's death or to the *path* that the soul follows after one's death. Tilak flits between one and the other: he first follows the assurance of the verses about the good that comes from dying at the right time, then turns round to say that, of course, all this is contingent upon one's *karma*. Next he tells us that the meaning of the verses gradually changed as the reference to "time" gradually came to be taken to be a reference to "path"—without telling us, of course, which of the two he thinks is the correct interpretation. And, finally, he finds in this reference to the northern and southern solstices a confirmation of his theory about the Arctic home of the *Vedas*![208]

Gandhi, as we shall see in Chapter 11, is more self-assured and more consistent. He rejects the stanzas outright.[209] "I do not understand the meaning of these two *shloka*-s," he says, "they do not seem to me to be consistent with the teaching of the *Gita*. The *Gita* teaches that he whose heart is meek with devotion, who is devoted to unattached action and has seen the truth must win salvation, no matter when he dies. These *shloka*-s seem to run counter to this. They may perhaps be stretched to mean broadly that a man of sacrifice, a man of light, a man who has known Brahman finds release from birth if he retains that enlightenment at the time of death, and

[205] Compare *The Bhagvad-Gita with the Commentary of Sri Shankaracharya*, *op. cit.*, pp. 234-236 and *Brahma-Sutras Bhashya of Shankaracharya*, *op. cit.*, pp. 886 889.

[206] *Shankaracharya*. *ibid.*, p. 868.

[207] *Vedanta-Sutras with Ramanuja's Commentary*, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

[208] B.G. Tilak, *Gita-Rahasya*, Poona, 1975 reprint, pp. 408-412.

[209] M. K. Gandhi, *The Gita According to Gandhi*, Mahadeva Desai (ed.), Navjivan, Ahmedabad, 1956, p. 262.

that on the contrary the man who has none of these attributes goes to the world of the moon—not at all lasting—and returns to birth. . . ."

So, we have a wide enough choice, do we not? We can trust the *Gita* and believe that dying in the southern solstice is bad or we can put our faith in the *Brahma-Sutra*-s and believe that it is not; we can take the view that the time of death has an influence independently of one's *karma* or that it does not; we can take the view that the topic of discussion is not time of death at all but the course that our souls will follow after death; we can reject the *shloka*-s completely and imply that they are interpolations on the ground that they are inconsistent with what is said elsewhere; or, finally, we can be non-commital about whether the verses are affirming a fact or not, we can note that over the centuries "time" has come to mean "path" but insist that the original reference to "time" helps establish that the *Vedas* originated in the Arctic!

We can do any of this but we should never doubt *that the texts reveal the ultimate reality.*

Well, now that the soul is departing from the body—at a particular time or along a particular path—*enveloped by what does it proceed on its journey*? By water, implies *Brahma-Sutra,* 3.1.1. But also by fire and earth, says *Sutra* 3.1.2. But the relevant text mentions water alone, where do fire and earth come in? O, water alone is mentioned, says the *Sutrakara,* only "because of its preponderance" in the mixture and not because it is the only substance that is present. *Sutra*-s 3.3.3, 4 go a step farther: the soul is also accompanied by the vital force and the organs (and in this these *Sutra*-s follow *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad* [4.4.2] which tells us, "after him, as he goes out, the vital force, *prana,* goes out. After the vital force, as it goes out, all the breaths go out. . ."). But then what about *Brihad-Aranyaka* 3.2.13, in which we are told that when a man dies the vocal organ *merges* in fire, the nose (*i.e.,* the sense of smell) *merges* in the air, etc.? As the organs *merge* in these elements, how can we maintain that they also accompany the soul in its onward journey? O, nothing to it, says Shankara: the earlier passage of the Upanishad (3.2.13) uses "merges" in a secondary sense, *i.e.* even though it says so *it does not really mean that the organs merge* into fire, water, etc.![210]

What about passage 3.2.11 in the same Upanishad? In it the great sage Yajnavalkya is asked, "When this one dies, do the organs then go up from this one or do they not?" And he answers "*no,*" does he not? Does passage 4.4.6 of the same Upanishad not say, "Of him who is without desires, who is free from desires, the objects of whose desires have been obtained, and to whom all objects of desire are but the Self, the organs do *not* depart"? Do these passages not tell us that the organs stay behind with the body and the soul proceeds without them? No, no, says *Brahma-Sutra* 4.2.12. When the Upanishad says "the organs do *not* depart" it does *not* mean "they do not leave *the body*" but that "they do not leave *the soul,*" *i.e.,* when the Upani-

[210] Cf., Shankara's Commentary on *Brahma-Sutra-s,* 3.1.3-4.

shad says "the organs do *not* depart," it really means that they *do* depart from the body and accompany the soul! Shankara parrots this explanation, the same Shankara who in general insists that the soul is the same as Brahman, that nothing exists apart from pure, undifferentiated consciousness and to whom, on most occasions, talk of separate entities like organs, etc., is itself proof of ignorance.[211]

Well, if the organs accompany the liberated souls, *do the liberated souls have bodies, do they have limbs?* As you can maintain what you like about "souls," you can answer this question too in any way you like. Yet the question occasions much serious debate. The great Baadari says, "No" (*Brahma-Sutra*-s, 4.4.10), the great Jaimini says, "Yes" (*Sutra* 4.4.11) and the great Badarayana says "some do (have bodies) and some do not" (*Sutra* 4.4.12). Once again we get a wide enough choice, do we not? "No," "yes" and "sometimes."

From what point on do one's karma not cling to a person? As *karma* themselves are non-verifiable, again one can spin out such theories as one likes. The *Brahma-Sutra*-s distinguish between those who have performed works such as the *Agnihotra* sacrifice, etc., and the realized souls. In the case of the former the verdict seems to be: *karma* does not cling from the time of death onwards (*Sutra* 4.1.14). But the matter is not that simple: reading *Sutra* 4.1.15 along with 4.1.14, the answer seems to be that in their case *karma* do not cling from the moment of death *except* the *Karma* that have already begun yielding their fruit. Not only do we have an imaginary hair, *karma*, we now have the imaginary hair split in two![212] As for realized souls, the verdict seems to be muffled. In *Sutra* 4.1.13 we learn that in their case neither past nor future deeds, whether evil or good, cling. This implies that *karma* cease to cling *from the moment knowledge dawns*, that is, they no longer cling even though (for collateral reasons such as we shall consider later) the *Jnanin* continues to live in his present body. (If implying the latter were not the intent of the *Sutrakara* the reference to *future* evil or good acts that the *Jnanin* may perform would be superfluous.) *Sutra*-s 3.2.27-30, on the other hand, assert that even in the case of realized souls *karma* do not cling only *from the moment of death*. The *Kaushitaki Upanishad* (1.4) offers a third version. It says that the realized soul shakes of his *karma* only upon reaching a river called *Vijara* in the *Brahma*-world. We thus again have a wide spectrum of answers to choose from—the moment knowledge dawns, the moment of death, the moment one reaches the river *Vijara*.

What happens to the karma that the person now sheds? His properties go to his sons, says the *Kaushitaki* passage just quoted, his good deeds go to his friends and the evil to his foes. *Karma*, that imaginary hair, has now become a transferable asset![213] (Indeed it seems to be as easily transfered as

[211] *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya*, *op. cit.*, pp. 859-861.

[212] A commentator like Tilak takes this splitting of what is a tautologous notion to begin with to be profound wisdom and "explains" various matters on the basis of this imaginary distinction: Cf., Tilak, *Gita-Rahasya*, *op. cit.*, Chapter X.

[213] See *Brahma-Sutra*-s, 3.3.25-28 for an elaboration of this transferability.

it is valuable: it turns out that the relatives of not just a *Jnani* but even of a *sannyasi* are delivered, indeed the relatives even of one who renounces in his last breath. "The scripture says," says the *Shatyaniyopanishad*, "that a very pious mendicant monk redeems *thirty* generations of his family after him, *thirty* generations before him and *thirty* generations after those that follow (the first thirty). The Vedic teaching is that the ancestors of (a wise man) are redeemed if he were to say that he has renounced even while his final breath remains in his throat (*i.e.*, just at the moment of death)."[214] The *Sannyasopanishad* manages to promise at once more as well as less. While the *Shatyaniyopanishad* has promised the boon to ninety generations, the *Sannyasopanishad* assures it to one hundred and twenty generations; but the boon is much less, as against redemption assured by the former it assures only that the generations will be "raised to glory." "That wise man," affirms this Upanishad, "who says 'I have renounced,' raises to glory sixty generations of his family before him and sixty generations after him."[215]

But the splitting and sub splitting of this imaginary magnitude is not finished as yet. Someone thinks up a further complication: assuming for a moment that the *Jnanin* sheds his *karma* upon leaving his body, does he shed *all* his *karma* or *only some of them*? For, it turns out, if he is taken to have shed *all* his *karma* then his soul must be taken to have shed not just its "gross" body but also its "subtle" body. Now, if the soul sheds its subtle body too, wonders our interrogator, how will it undertake the journey that the Upanishads say it has to undertake across the *Brahma*-world? (It seems that, at least on this reckoning, bodiless entities cannot travel.) Ramanuja is in a quandary. He realizes that journeys cannot be undertaken without a body of some kind and also that if all the *karma* are shed then all kinds of body too must have been shed. On the other hand, the journey *has* to be gone through, because that's what the Upanishads say the soul does and for the journey the subtle body at least must be around. "But how can the subtle body persist when the works which give rise to it have passed away," Ramanuja is asked. "Through the power of knowledge," he replies with perfect equanimity! "Knowledge does not itself originate the subtle body," he quickly adds, "*but it possesses the power of making that body persist*, even after the gross body—which is the instrument for the experience of all ordinary pains and pleasures—and all works have passed away, so as to thereby make the souls capable of moving on the path of the gods, and thus to obtain Brahman which is the fruit of knowledge."[216]

The sequence is typical: an empty concept, in this case *karma* and its shedding, leads to a problem; a new concept is invented; it lands one in a new problem; and so further concepts and powers—in this case the power of knowledge to keep the "subtle body" around when, *mutatis mutandis*, it

[214] *Shatyaniyopanishad*, 34-35.
[215] *Sannyasopanishad*, 2. 10.
[216] *Vedanta-Sutras with Ramanuja's Commentary*, op. cit., pp. 649-650, and *Brahma-*

should have disappeared—are invented to overcome the new problem. . . .

Upon leaving the body, *what path do the souls follow*? Now, we have an imaginary entity—the soul—racing across imaginary highways. It is not surprising then that the usual disagreements arise and the usual devices are employed to get over them.

While *Mundaka*, 1.2.11, speaks of the souls passing through the sun only and *Chandogya*, 8.5.5, also speaks of the souls directly ascending along the rays of the sun and of their reaching the sun "as quickly as one could direct his mind to it," *Brihad-Aranyaka*, 5.10.1, talks of the soul moving successively to the wind, the sun, the moon and then "to the world that is without heat, without cold. Therein," it concludes, "he dwells for eternal years." Passage 6.2.15 of the same Upanishad is more elaborate. It speaks of the souls moving successively to the flame, thence to the day, to the half month of the waxing moon, to the six months during which the sun moves northwards, to the world of the gods, to the sun and then to the lightning fire, from thereon a person "consisting of mind" conducts them on to the *Brahma*-world. In this world "they dwell for long periods. Of these there is no return." *Chandogya* 4.15.5 and 5.10.1, follow the *order* of *Brihad-Aranyaka*, 6 2.15, except that they add two additional mile-stones and make one deletion: they do not mention "the world of the gods"; instead, in between "the six months when the sun moves northwards" and the "sun" they add "year" and between the "sun" and "lightning" they add "the moon." *Kaushitaki*, 1.3., uses a different nomenclature for the milestones: the soul, it says, goes successively to the worlds of fire, *Vayu*, *Varuna*, *Indra*, *Prajapati* and then on to the world of Brahman.

These are just a few of the many enumeiations that are given in the literature. However, three points are obvious even from these illustrative enumerations: (*i*) the enumeration of the intermediate milestones is not the same; (*ii*) the order of the milestones is not always the same; finally, (*iii*) the precise significance of the intermediate stops is not always the same; for instance, *Chandogya*, 8.6.5, talks of the *sun* as the sorting centre—"that verify, indeed, is the world-door, an entrance for knowers, a stopping for non-knowers"—while *Kaushitaki*, 1.2., asserts that the sorting is done at the *moon*.

These imaginative enumerations, these chimerical pathways occasion much controversy. *Brahma-Sutra*-s, 4.2.18 to 4.3.6 are devoted to sorting things out. Various rules of thumb are invented to get over the apparent dissimilarities: the *shorter* enumerations are to be subsumed in the *longer* enumerations; some of the enumerations are just *enumerations* while others are to be taken as indicating the order of progression also; some designations of some milestones—Ramanuja talks of "the world of gods" mentioned in *Brihad-Aranyaka*, 6.2.15, as an instance—are not to be taken as indicating a *definite place* but as just *general expressions*.[217] In any case, (and for once Shankara and Ramanuja agree) while the milestones mentioned

[217] *Vedanta-Sutras with Ramanuja's Commentary*, op. cit., p. 7[illegible]

may be different, they are all along *one* path; after all, in all cases the souls reach the same goal, Brahman.[218] Thus while the enumerations of milestones are unfortunately different, the texts are *not* in disagreement, you see. The fact that all souls reach the same goal proves, does it not, that the path is the same? Ever heard of different paths reaching the same destination? Obviously Shankara and Ramanuja never did.

You will be wrong if you think that this is all the controversy that our interlocutors can squeeze from the enumerations. There are other earth-shaking matters to be settled.

Upon departure from the body *do the souls of the ignorant and those of the cognoscenti follow the same course*? On the basis of *Brihad-Aranyaka*, 4.4.2, *Brahma-Sutra*, 4.2.7, says "Yes." Similarly, *Chandogya*, 8.6 5, assures us that "when *anyone* departs from the body thus, he goes up along these rays." Shankara quotes the *Brihad-Aranyaka* passage but he is always keen to establish that the knowers are special, that everything about them is special, and so he insists that, whatever the texts may say, the souls of the cognoscenti *do* commence their journey, and those of the others do *not*, by leaving the body through the head.[219]

Chandogya, 8.6.5, as we saw, says that the soul ascends along the rays of the sun. But what happens if the person dies at night? *Brahma-Sutra* 4.2.19 is reassuring: the soul still travels along the sun's rays, says *Chandogya*, 8.6.2, "since the connection between the arteries and the rays continues (at all times, *i.e.*, during the night as much as during the day) as long as the body lasts," and because, as Shankara and Ramanuja both insist, the rays of the sun actually do exist even at night, though they are not perceived.[220] Shankara this time slips into candour. We must insist that the connection between the rays of the sun and the arteries is *always* present, he says, for "if it be supposed that even a man of knowledge cannot proceed upward owing to the offence of dying at night, then the fruit of knowledge will become uncertain, so that men will have no inducement to it, for one cannot regulate the time of one's death."[221] Thus, we must insist that this non-verifiable "fact" is always true lest we lose our flock. Necessity, we can clearly see, has been a mother for a long time!

Well, leave the path aside, *what is it that the souls reach at the end*? The conditioned Brahman, says the great Baadari, and they stay with Him till the dissolution of the cosmos when they merge into the higher Brahman. No, says the great Jaimini, they go straight to the Absolute Brahman. Neither, says the great Badaayyana: those that worship the *saguna* Brahman go to the *saguna* Brahman and those that worship the *nirguna* Brahman go to the

nirguna Brahman.[222] So much for Shankara's and Ramanuja's confident assertion that, whatever the differences in the enumeration of the milestones, the path indicated is one and the same as it leads to one destination!

When they at last reach Brahman, *in what relationship to Him do the souls subsist?*

All of our seers seem to agree that upon liberation "the soul becomes manifest in its own real nature" (*Brahma-Sutra*-s, 4.4.1) and most also seem to agree that from then on "the soul exists in a state of inseparableness from the Supreme Self" (*Sutra*, 4.4.4). But there the agreement ends—for neither can the seers agree about what "the real nature" of the soul is nor about what precisely is implied by "existing in a state of inseparableness."

Jaimini maintains that the liberated souls merely acquire the attributes of the nature of Brahman, but that they continue to retain an identity even upon reaching Brahman (*Sutra* 4.4.5). Does *Chandogya*, 8.12.3, not say, "There such a one goes around laughing, sporting, having enjoyment with women or chariots or friends. . ."? Does *Chandogya*, 7.25.2, not speak of the knowing-self moving about with unlimited freedom in all the worlds? Does *Taittiriya*, 2.1, not speak of the knowing-self obtaining all desires, together with (i.e., in the company of) the Supreme Brahman? Does Krishna in the *Gita* (14.2) not speak of knowers attaining to an equality of attributes with the Supreme? How could the liberated souls do any of this unless, even upon reaching Brahman, each retained an individual identity? In this view, then, what happens is that the liberated soul acquires attributes such as freedom from evil, hunger, thirst, sorrow, freedom of movement, autonomy, self-luminosity, etc., that are spoken of in passages such as *Chandogya*, 8.1.5, 8.7.1 etc., that is, it acquires the attributes of Brahman. Not quite all the attributes, though; it acquires the properties of Brahman except, as *Sutra*-s, 4.1.17-21 note, the powers of the creating, running and reabsorbing the universe.

No, says Audolini, this is not the whole truth. "The liberated soul becomes established in consciousness as consciousness itself, that being its true nature" (*Sutra*, 4.4.6). Does *Mundaka*, 3.1.1, not say that the knower attains "supreme identity" with Brahman and has Brahman not been repeatedly declared to be just a mass of consciousness? When it acquires "supreme identity" with pure undifferentiated consciousness, what could the soul be in that state except that same pure undifferentiated consciousness? Does *Brihad-Aranyaka* (4.5.13) not say of the soul's true nature, "it is,—as is a mass of salt, without inside, without outside, entirely a mass of taste, even so, verily, is this soul, without inside, without outside, entirely a mass of knowledge"? As this is its true nature and as upon liberation it is said to acquire its true nature, where is the question of its acquiring specific attributes? Does *Katha*, 4.15, not say "as pure water poured forth

[222]See *Brahma-Sutras*, 4.3.7-11 for Baadari's view, 4.3.12-14 for Jaimini's view and 4.3.15 for Badarayana's view. Upanishadic passages can, as usual, be cited to fortify each view.

into pure becomes the very same, so becomes the soul, O Gautama, of the seer who has understanding"? Does *Mundaka*, 3.2.8, not say "as the flowing rivers into the ocean disappear, quitting name and form, so the knower, being liberated from name and form, goes into the Heavenly Person, higher than the high"? Where is the scope for retaining a separate identity in all this, asks Audolini?

Faced with this choice between the great Jaimini and the great Audolini, the great Badarayana chooses both! They are both right, he says in *Brahma-Sutra*, 4.4.7, as the Upanishads themselves affirm both positions and, he adds for good measure, "there is no contradiction." How come? O, that's quite simple, says Ramanuja, inventing another rule of thumb: "of authorities of equal strength one cannot refute the other. . . . Where two statements rest on equal authority, that only which suffers from intrinsic impossibility is to be interpreted in a different way (*i.e.*, a way that is different from what it means on the face of it) so as not to conflict with the other." But, as of the two positions—that the liberated souls exist as separate entities but with Brahman's attributes and that they, as mere consciousness, merge completely into the pure-consciousness, that is into Brahman—as of these two positions neither is intrinsically impossible, we must take them *both* to be true; that is, we must believe that "although the text declares the souls to have mere intelligence for its essential nature, all the same the previously stated attributes, *viz.*, freedom from all sin and so on, are not to be excluded."[223]

From what point, when and why do the souls of the ignorant return? There is, as we noted above, some disagreement about the point from which these souls turn back. The *Kaushitaki Upanishad* talks of them returning from the moon which is spoken of as the great test-centre while the *Chandogya* talks of the sun as the testing gate (please remember that in the route, as certified by the *Brihad-Aranyaka Upanishad*, the moon comes *after* the sun!) As to when the souls commence their journey back the explanation is a fairly standard one: "Having resided there," says *Chandogya*, 5.10.15, "*till the residue of their karma is exhausted*. . . ."; "*Exhausting the results of whatever work* he did in this life," says *Brihad-Aranyaka* (4.4.6), "he returns from that world to this for (fresh) work. . . ."; "and *when their past work is exhausted*. . ," repeats *Brihad Aranyaka* (6.2.16), they commence their journey back. The *Gita* too gives similar explanations: the one who strove earnestly but failed in this birth, Krishna tells Arjuna in the *Gita* (6.37-41), "attains to the world of the righteous and having dwelt there for eternal years" returns to this earth to continue his efforts. Similarly, in *Gita*, 9.20, 21 Krishna speaks of "the men of the three *Vedas*, the *soma* drinkers, purified from sin, worshipping Me by sacrifices, pray for the goal of heaven; they reach the holy world of the Lord of the Gods," He says, "and enjoy in heaven the heavenly pleasures of the Gods. Having enjoyed that spacious world of *Svarga*, *their merit exhausted*, they enter the world of mortals. . . ."

[223]*Vedanta-Sutras with Ramanuja's Commentary*, *op. cit.*, pp. 761-762.

All seem to agree, therefore, that it is the exhaustion of the residual effects of their meritorious deeds—an unverifiable entity—which sets souls off on their return journey and that the purpose for which they return to the earth is to continue their Sisyphian labours here. But why is it that they have to return to the earth to continue their labours? Having reached the higher world, why can they not continue their labours *there* and ascend *directly from* that higher world itself? Your guess is as good as that of the Upanishads and the *Gita*! The question is not even taken up.

Well, let us not be too particular. Let us assume that for one reason or another the souls have commenced their journey back to the earth. We are back to the old question: *what route do they follow in their descent*? "By that course by which they came they return again," says *Chandogya*, 5.10.5. And what is this course? "Just as they came, into space; from space, into mind. After having become smoke, he becomes mist. After having become mist, he becomes cloud. . ." (*Chandogya*, 5.10.5-6). Now, this is not quite the route that was followed in the ascent.[224] But, never mind, the account gets more and more interesting: "After having become cloud he rains down. (And there) they (the souls) are born as rice and barley, as herbs and trees, as sesame plants and beans" (*Chandogya*, 5 10 6). And what next? "Thence, verily, indeed, it is difficult to emerge, for only if some one or other eats him as food and emits him as semen, does he develop further" (*ibid*). Woe to the soul-that-is barley which gets eaten by a woman, for *it* is unlikely to be "emitted as semen" and will, therefore, fester in the *cul de sac* of the barley patch! But press on, what next? "Accordingly," continues *Chandogya*, 5.10.7, "those who are of pleasant conduct here—the prospect is, indeed, they will enter a pleasant womb, either the womb of a Brahmin, or the womb of a *Kshatriya*, or the womb of a *Vaishya* But those who are of stinking conduct here—the prospect is, indeed, that they will enter a stinking womb, either the womb of a dog, or the womb of a swine, or the womb of an outcaste."

Even the *womb* of an outcaste stinks, does it? It is the same, is it as the womb of a dog or a swine? And all this from the mouth of Brahman Himself? And yet we pride ourselves on our tolerance! Incidentally, *stinking* wombs are not quite the same as *sinful* wombs just as pleasant wombs are not the same as virtuous wombs! According to *Chandogya*, 5.10.7, as we have just seen *Vaishya*-s make their way through *pleasant* wombs. According to the *Gita*, 9.32, as we saw in the last chapter, *Vaishya*-s along with *Shudra* and all women are born of *sinful* wombs! Notice also that the text talks of *all* women, whatever their caste. A Brahmin womb is pleasant but sinful when a daughter is making her way through it but some cosmic detergent gets to work when a son is to make his way through the same womb so that it becomes both pleasant and virtuous!

[224]And, contrary to the claim in *Chandogyopanishad*, 5.10.5, that the same route is being followed in descent as was followed while ascending, Ramanuja has to admit that it is different; cf., *Vedanta-Sutras with Ramanuja's Commentary*, *op. cit.*, p. 591.

In any case, were we not told that the souls return after they have exhausted the residual effects of their *karma*? How then is their *past karma* still determining whether they will enter the perfumed womb of a Brahmin or the stinking womb of an outcaste?

But our friends—Shankara, Ramanuja and the others—have no time for answering that. (If pressed they can always fall back on that mysterious distinction between *karma* that have begun yielding fruit and those that have not.)[225] They are on to another earth-shaking question. The Upanishad has spoken of the souls becoming rain-drops and then becoming rice, barley, herbs, trees, sesame and beans; *do the souls who are born as these plants enjoy the pain and sorrow that is natural to these plants?* This is the earth-shaking question that now engages our seers. *Brahma-Sutra*, 3.1.24, specifically deals with this question. No, it says, the souls in transit do not suffer the pains, etc., that are natural to the plants, they merely ride piggy-back on the souls that already inhabit the plants, the latter and not the former suffer the pains and enjoy the pleasures customary to the plants. Well, that is reassuring. But what about the *Chandogya* text? Did it not say that the souls are "*born*" as the plants? Does that not mean that the souls-in-transit are embodied as plants in this instance, just as they will later be embodied as Brahmins or *Chandal*-s and shouldn't they suffer as all embodied souls do? No, say Shankara and Ramanuja both, in this case the expression "to be born" is being used in a secondary, figurative sense only and is not to be taken literally![226]

Tell me one thing: in all this you have spoken of the soul doing this, of the soul doing that, of the soul suffering, of the soul enjoying itself, you have also said that the souls as well as matter are a part of Brahman, how then is it that the *parts* suffer and enjoy but the *whole* is completely untouched by these states? O, just as light is not affected by the condition of the things on which it falls, says *Brahma-Sutra*, 2.3.46, just as the sun is not ruffled when the water in the pots that is reflecting it is ruffled, says *Sutra*, 2.3.50. Is that all that good an answer? After all, the things upon which the light falls are not a *part* of the light, the water in the pots is not a *part* of the sun. The question was, "how does no part of the whole suffer when parts of it suffer?" O, that's elementary, says Shankara. Firstly, Brahman has no body. He has no parts; what is all this talk of His *parts* suffering, etc.? Secondly, there is no suffering in reality, it is born of attachment which is born of nescience; as Brahman is untouched by nescience, He is also untouched by states such as suffering.[227]

What Shankara says about Brahman being beyond suffering is true, says Ramanuja, but for the wrong reasons. Firstly, who says Brahman does not

[225] *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya*, op. cit., pp. 583-585; *Vedanta-Sutras with Ramanuja's Commentary*, op. cit., pp. 597-598.

[226] *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya*, op. cit., pp. 583-585 and *Vedanta-Sutras with Ramanuja's Commentary*, op. cit., pp. 597-598.

[227] *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya*, op. cit., pp. 118, 510-511.

have a body? The souls and matter *are* His body. Secondly, what is all this talk of nescience? Indeed when you think rationally about it you cannot even conceive of a substrata for nescience. It cannot be Brahman for, by your definition, He is pure intelligence. It cannot be the soul for, on your definition again, it exists in so far only as it is fictitiously imagined through the very nescience that you are trying to anchor. It cannot be matter for that is, also by your definition, non-sentient [228]

But then how do *you*, Mr. Ramanuja, explain that while souls suffer, Brahman does not? O, that's simple. What causes suffering is not the existence or non-existence of a body (both the soul and Brahman have bodies) but whether one's body is contingent on and embroiled in *karma* or not. And, you see, the Atman's body is embroiled in *karma* while that of a Brahman is not.[229] But how do we know, Mr. Ramanuja, that Brahman's body and the Atman's body differ in this essential respect? We just do. But did you not say that the souls and matter themselves constitute the body of Brahman? If these *which are his body* are embroiled in *karma*, how can He ensure that *His body* is not embroiled in *karma*? He just can. You see no contradiction here, Mr. Ramanuja? No, not at all, and the very fact that He can, far from revealing a contradiction, "rather proves for Brahman supreme lordly powers and thus adds to His excellences."[230]

What is one to say to one who so emphatically believes in his own fabrications?

Nor should we expect any more reasonableness or consistency from Shankara. After all, if the multi-formed and variegated world is created by Brahman out of Himself (and to the fact of creation, of His making Himself many the Upanishads themselves testify) how can we still maintain that He is "partless" as well as "immutable?" He has Himself created *"parts"* in the form of different entities so He cannot now be "partless," can He?; And in *creating* them out of Himself He must certainly have been through a mutation, is it not?[231]

The *Brahma-Sutra*-s take the easiest way out: as each of the contrary asser-

[228] *Vedanta-Sutras with Ramanuja's Commentary*, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-129, 436-443. Having
rejected nescience, Ramanuja, presents a view that goes to the opposite extreme: as
all is real, it is maintained, all knowledge is equally real and valid: "*Shruti* and *Smriti*
alike teach that everything participates in the nature of everything else. In the same
way all things are composed of elements of all things. . . .In the same way *cognition*
of water in the mirage is true. There always exists water in conjunction with light and
earth, but owing to mere defect of the eye of the perceiving person, and to the
mysterious influence of merit and demerit, the light and the earth are *not* apprehended,
while the water *is* apprehended. . . .In the case of one direction being mistaken for
another (as when a person thinks the south to be where the north is) the fact is that,
owing to the unseen principle (of merit and demerit) the direction which actually
exists *in* the other direction (for a point which is to the north of one is to the south
of another point) is apprehended by itself, apart from the other elements of direction:
the apprehension which actually takes place is thus likewise true. . . ." *Ibid.*, pp. 119-123.

[229] *Ibid.*, pp. 228-229, 260-261, 265, 607-614.

[230] *Ibid.*, pp. 260-261.

[231] *Brahma-Sutra-s*, 2.1.26.

tions is made in the Upanishads, that is as the Upanishads affirm that He "creates" out of Himself but also that He is "immutable," that He creates entities that remain parts of Him and is yet "partless," as the Upanishads affirm each of these propositions they must all be true![232]

Shankara goes the *Brahma-Sutra*-s one better. There really has been no "creation" of anything, he says. All that we imagine to have been "created" is only a figment of our imagination!

> For a thing does not become multiformed just because aspects are imagined on it through ignorance. Nor that the moon, perceived to be many by a man with blurred vision (*timira*-diplopia) becomes really so. Brahman becomes subject to all kinds of (phenomenal) actions like transformation, on account of the differences of aspects, constituted by name and form, which remain either differentiated or undifferentiated, which cannot be determined either as real or unreal, and which are imagined through ignorance. In its real aspect Brahman remains unchanged and beyond all phenomenal actions. And since the differences of name and form are ushered into being through mere speech, the partlessness of Brahman is not violated . . . .[233]

And just to make sure that you do not retain any residual belief in creation, he adds a pragmatic argument to boot:

> . . . Besides, this text about transformation is not meant to establish transformation as a fact, for no fruit is seen to result from such a knowledge.[234]

But just a little later (when the time comes to comment on *Sutra*-s 2.2.28, 29) it is the same Shankara who scoffs at the Vijnanavadin's view that he cannot perceive any object apart from his perception, "yes," he says, "you do speak like that, since you have no curb to your mouth . . . "; it is the same Shankara who so recently was telling us that objects are but figments of ignorance, it is the same Shankara who now says, "how can a man's word be acceptable who while himself perceiving an external object through sense contacts still says, 'I do not perceive and that object does not exist,' just as much as a man while eating and himself experiencing the satisfaction from that act might say, 'Neither, do I eat, nor do I get any satisfaction' . . . ."[235] How, Mr. Shankara, are we to accept the words of a man who insists that the world does not exist, that the teacher does not exist, that the pupil does not exist and who yet spends his life teaching and discoursing and setting up *maths* in far-off places?

One can go on and on like this following our great thinkers as they start

[232] *Ibid.*, 2.1.27.
[233] *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya*, *op. cit.*, p. 356.
[234] *Ibid.*, see also, *ibid.*, p. 333.
[235] *Ibid.*, pp. 418–423.

with empty boxes, as they stuff such meanings into them as they like, as they then get into arguments about the "true meaning" of the concepts they just invented, as they catch each other in contradictions, as each invents new concepts, new rules of thumb to explain away his inconsistencies and so on and on. But the examples I have listed summarily will suffice to illustrate two points that I have already stated; and they will point to a third.

The first is that the controversies are unresolvable; the basic concepts being non-verifiable and empty each can go on asserting what he will about them and then go on building what he will on them, that the controversies are really no more than controversies between, to recall Lenin's apt expression once again, those who maintain the Devil is green and those who insist he is yellow. And yet they have been the basis of school-mongering in our philosophy and sect-mongering in our religion.

Second, as our seers seem to have stated such diametrically opposed conclusions about the questions they considered, it is a bit much for us to boast that they glimpsed and discovered and propounded what the ultimate reality is.

The third inference follows from the types of questions that preoccupied our seers and philosophers. They can only be described as questions about the proper way of trisecting an imaginary hair. Who is it that benefits when generation after generation, when literally for a millenia, the very best minds of a people lose themselves in questions of this kind? What could be better for those who are on the top of the pile than that the very best minds, instead of looking at the state of affairs around them, should lose themselves in speculations about the paths that souls take to go up and down?

TURNING POINTS

Nowhere is the weakness of the tradition shown up more than in explaining how a course of events changes direction. The empty concepts are of no help. New concepts are invented. And they too turn out to be just as devoid of content as the ones they were intended to supplement.

Let us begin at the beginning—*why does creation commence*? The Upanishads repeat one standard answer again and again: being alone the undifferentiated Absolute, they say, "had no enjoyment," being alone He "did not quite feel at ease," and, therefore, He "desired another."[236] Now this "loneliness," this "desire for another"—these are just empty concepts, they are just invented to account for something the texts are unable to account for, *i.e.*, the commencement of creation. After all, how come the entity which is pure Bliss should feel lonesome? How can a differentiated state—desire

[236]For representative passages in the Upanishads see *Brihad-Aranyaka*, 1.2.1, 4; 1.4.3, 17; *Chandogya*, 6.2.3; *Taittiriya*, 2.6; *Aitareya*, 1.1.1; *Prashna*, 1.4; *Paingale*, 1.7; *Maitri*, 2.6; *Maha*, 1.2.8; *Brihajjabala*, 1.1-2; *Narayana*, 1.1; *Nrisimha Tapiny*, *Purva-Tapini*, 1. 1; *Tripad-Vibhuti-Maha-Narayana*, 2.14; and following them *Brahma-Sutra-s*, 2.1.32, 33.

—arise in one who is a completely undifferentiated consciousness, who is—as we have seen earlier—so purely undifferentiated-a-consciousness that He cannot even have conscious knowledge of Himself?[237]

But neither the texts nor the commentaries pause to consider this. Having pronounced that He felt lonesome and, therefore, "desired another," they now proceed as if they have successfully explained the origin of the Universe and everything in it.

Once this has been granted for the initial differentiation, every subsequent development too is attributed to this handy "desire for another." "Verily, in the beginning," notes *Maitri* (2.6), "Prajapati stood alone. He had no enjoyment, being alone. He then, by meditating upon Himself, created numerous offspring. He saw them inanimate and lifeless, like a stone, standing like a frost. He had no enjoyment. He then thought to Himself. 'Let me enter within, in order to animate them'." So, we now have animation and sentience too. *Chandogya* (6.2.3,4) goes a step further: the "desire for another" motivates not just the Absolute Brahman but also each successive element that comes up: ". . . It bethought Itself, 'would that I were many. Let me procreate Myself.' It emitted heat. That heat bethought itself, 'Would that I were many. Let me procreate myself.' It emitted water. Therefore whenever a person grieves or perspires from heat, then water (either tears or perspiration) is produced. That water bethought itself, 'Would that I were many. Let me procreate myself.' It emitted food. Therefore, whenever it rains, then there is abundant food. So food for eating is produced just from water . . . ."

The same "desire" for folding up the show, the same black boxes like "the exhaustion of *karma*" are brought in to explain the eventual dissolution and reabsorption of the Universe. "*Ishvara* developed the *desire to dis-quintuplicate* the quintuplicated elements," says the *Paingala Upanishad* in a typical account of the end, "After causing the macrocosms, the worlds comprised in them and other effects, to recede into their (antecedent) causal form, after making into one the subtle body, the organs of actions, the life principles, the organs of perception and the fourfold inner sense, and after merging all elements in the fivefold causal elements, He causes earth to dissolve in water, water in fire, fire in air, air in ether, ether in the self-sense, the self-sense in the great, the great in the unmanifested, and the

[237]Indeed a great deal other than the initial act of differentiation is loaded on to the Lord's "desire," 'compassion', etc. Thus, though *without any desire* Himself, the Lord teaches Arjuna out of *a desire* for the latter's well-being (*Gita*, 10.1). Though without any attributes Himself, He destroys the ignorance of His devotees out of *compassion* for them (*Gita*, 10.11) and so on. Similarly, we are told that Brahman alone bestows rewards and punishments, that on some he bestows "the different forms of enjoyment in this and the heavenly world and Release which consists in attaining to a nature like His own" on "being *pleased by* sacrifices, gifts, offerings and the like, as well as by pious meditation" (c.f. the comments of Shankaracharya and Ramanuja on *Brahma-Sutra-s*, 3.2.37-40). But, why, pray, should the pure, undifferentiated consciousness be *pleased by* such trifles as "sacrifices, gifts, offerings and the like"?

unmanifested in the Self in due order. The *Virat*, the *Hiranyagarbha* and the Supreme Lord, owing to the dissolutions of their respective origin, etc., lapse into the Supreme Self. The gross body composed of the quintuplicated gross elements organized through the accumulated (past) *karma* owing to the destruction of *karma* and the ripening of the fruits of good *karma*, becoming one with the subtle body, attaining the form of the causal body, causes the causal body to merge in the unchanging inner Self. The three states of *Vishva*, *Taijasa*, *Prajna*, on account of the dissolution of their adjuncts, merge in the inner Self. The microcosm, being burnt (and purified) by the fire of knowledge, becomes merged along with its causes in the Supreme Self . . . ."[238]

So, creation comes about because of a "desire to be many" and dissolution comes about because of a "desire to disquintuplicate the quintuplicated elements." How neat and simple. But then *how does the universe recommence?* Because, once again, the Absolute is said to feel lonesome, and because the latent power of *karma* is not completely destroyed at the dissolution.[239] The "latent power?" Where does this come in and why do we need it? Simple: if our thinkers did not preserve this "latent power," they would have to heap upon the Lord the responsibility for the initial acts of evil which set all beings tumbling down.[240] And the wonder of wonders is that at each subsequent creation He "emits entire the world just as it had been before."[241] Now, why should our thinkers feel compelled to make this particular assertion that He emits "the entire world just as it had been before"? Why, for instance, not let Him create the Universe in one round *without* the *Vedas*? You see, our thinkers are *bound* to assert both that the Absolute creates the Universe from time to time and also to insist that the *Vedas* are eternal. If the Vedas come to an end with the dissolution of the Universe, then how could we say that they are eternal? And if we could not claim eternity for them would we not be lessening the awe in which we want the populace to hold them? Therefore, why not just assert that in each round Brahman "emits the entire world just as it had been before"? Who can prove the contrary, in any case? Now that we have established that the world is emitted "just as it had been before," we can proceed to assert that the *Vedas* are *always* present and are only *rediscovered* in each successive round by our seers: the new *Rishis* "being gifted by *Prajapati* with the requisite powers," says Ramanuja, "undergo suitable preparatory austerities and finally *see* the *mantas* and so on proclaimed by Vasishtha and other *Rishis* of former ages of the world, perfect in all their sounds and accents, without having learnt them from the recitation of a teacher." Thus it is that the *Vedas* speak of their own eternity as well as of *Rishis* in successive aeons

[238] *Paingalopanishad*, 3.3.
[239] *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya*, *op. cit.*, p. 220.
[240] This point has been discussed subsequently in Chapter 7 when we took up the question of creativity and responsibility.
[241] *Vedanta-Sutras with Ramanuja's Commentary*, *op. cit.*, pp. 334, 405.

being the *makers* of hymns, etc., in them! "The superhuman origin and eternity of the *Veda*," explains Ramanuja, "really mean that intelligent agents having received in their minds an impression due to previous recitations of the Veda in a fixed order of words, chapters and so on, remember and again recite it in that very same order of succession . . . ."[242] There is no conflict then, is there, between the fact that the universe and everything in it is created, dissolves and is re-created again and again and the fact that the *Vedas* are eternal? To the question, concludes Ramanuja, "whence all this is known?" the *Sutra* (1.3.29) replies "from the scripture and the Smriti" . . .'[243] That should remove all doubts, once and for all, shouldn't it?

Well, the Universe has commenced. *How are we to explain its subsequent and varied evolution?* Our seers now invent three new concepts—the three *guna*-s, *Sattva, Rajas* and *Tamas*—and maintain that these and their interaction explain all subsequent evolution. "When that (*mulaprakriti*) undergoes changes due to the preponderence of *Sattva*," explains the *Paingala Upanishad*, it becomes known as the unmanifested and has the power of veiling (the nature of Brahman). What is reflected in it becomes the *Ishvara*-consciousness . . . . . From the power of veiling dwelling in *Ishvara* there comes into being the power of projection, known as the *mahat*, due to the preponderance of *Rajas* . . . . He (the Creator) desirous of creating, embracing the quality of *Tamas*, desired to change the subtle elements into gross ones. Dividing each of the elements measured at the time of creation into two and again subdividing each into four equal parts and mixing each of the four subdivided equal parts with each of the four (second) equal parts of the other four elements and thus forming five heaps . . . " and so on proceeds one account of evolution.[244]

Following the Upanishads, the *Gita* too gets a lot of mileage out of the three *guna*-s. They are said to account for evolution (*Gita*, 14. 10-18), to determine an individual's conduct (3.27-29; 4. 10-13), to be constituents of delusion (7.13) by which all souls are bound (14.5-8; 18.10); the relative predominance of one over the others is said to determine one's subsequent birth (4.14, 15); they are said to account for the origin of wisdom in some, greed, heedlessness and error in others (4.17); they are what determine the quality or type of a devotee's faith (17.26); it is according to them that food is classified (17.7-10) and so are worship (17.11-13), austerities (17.14-19), gifts (17.20-22), types of renunciation (18.7-9), of knowledge (18.19-22), of action (18.23-25), of individuals (18.19-22), of intellects (18.30-32), of firmness (18.33-35) and even of pleasure (18.36-39).

But in fact the *guna*-s are nothing more than labels on empty boxes. The information content of these *guna*-based explanations is no more than it

[242] *Ibid.*, pp. 333-334.   [243] *Ibid.*, p. 334.

[244] *Paingalopanishad*, 1.4-12. The reader who is interested in following the successive divisions and subdivisions and mixings till a stage comes when the omniscient lord Himself gets deluded by the *maya* He has created, should look up the passages in the original.

would be if we were to say that there are three entities "Good," "Bad" and "Indifferent" or "Progress," "Regress" and "Inertia" which between them account for evolution, the conduct of individuals and all else. And yet a Tilak for instance, asserts, that "the difference between the *buddhi* of a thief and that of an honest man, or of persons belonging to different countries is explained by this theory (of the three *gunas*) in a satisfactory way."[215] How even the best among us can so completely suspend our critical faculties.

The hollowness of these "explanations" of evolution, etc., is easily exposed by going just one step behind the *guna*-s. You say that the differences in evolution, individual conduct, etc., are accounted for by differences in the preponderance of one or the other of the three *gunas*; what, pray, is it that accounts for the fact that in, say, one individual *Sattva* predominates and in another *Tamas* predominates? O, it is an effect of one's past *karma*, say our seers.[216] But what is it that accounted for the *first*, the *very first*, imbalance between the three *guna*-s, what accounted for the imbalance when the souls were first created—pure and untarnished—and which set some off on one road and others on another? O, that's the latent *karma* power from the *previous* rounds of creation. And so on. Instead of an "explanation" we get an infinite regress.

There is another way out for our seers also. The question of finding out what caused the differentiation among souls at the beginning, they, say, doesn't arise because there was no beginning at all. Does the *Katha Upanishad* (2.18) not tell us, "The wise one (the soul) is not born, nor dies. This one has not come from anywhere, has not become anyone. Unborn, constant, eternal, primeval, this one is not slain, when the body is slain . . ."? That is how we know, says the *Sutrakara* and following him Ramanuja, that the souls, even *before* each round of creation, exist in their subtle form with their latent *karma*.

Notice how the difficulty of explaining the first act in the sequence has been so easily overcome by our thinkers—they have just made their cosmology circular and asserted that there is no "first" to explain as there wasn't any "first" at all!

But you mean the *karma* do not perish when even the subtle bodies of the souls perish at the end of a *kalpa*? After all, the Upanishads do say ever so often that in between the *kalpa*-s all is "non-existent."

How do you think our philosopher will meet this new difficulty?

By another sleight-of-verbiage, how else? Well, you see, the subtle bodies do exist in between the *kalpa*-s, it is just that they exist in so subtle a form as to be *called* "non-existing."[217]

But why does Brahman create a prisonhouse for Himself? Why does He

[215] Tilak, *Gita-Rahasya*, *op. cit.*, p. 190.
[216] *Ibid.*, p. 189, to cite just one instance.
[217] *Brahma-Sutra*-s, 2.1.35; 3.1.1; *Vedanta-Sutras with Ramanuja's Commentary*, *op. cit.*, pp. 405-406.

delude Himself? Why does He create *maya* at all? He does so, we are told, out of "sport."[218] So we now have another black box, "His sport," His "*lila*" and another tautologuous "explanation." But why do we have this illusory existence of the world at all? That is because we are, and here is yet another black box that "explains" so much to this day, in *Kali-yuga*!

> Due to the influence of the *Kali* age, the indivisible, the flawless (Brahman) which is openly manifest as the all, which resembles *Gagana* or *Akasha* in its all pervasive character, by virtue of assuming the form of pulsatile throbbing, has attained the swirling character of worldly existence . . . .[219]

You mean there was no phenomenal world before *Kaliyuga* began?

"Explanations" of differences in the conduct of individuals have as little information content as "explanations" of the evolution of the cosmos. Why do I engage in evil acts? That, explain the Upanishads, is because evil *vasnas* are preponderant in you. But why are the evil *vasna*-s preponderent in me? That's because of the preponderance of evil *karma*-s in your ledger. But why are they preponderent? Because . . . and we are off on another ride on the Mobius strip. Here is a typical "explanation" for the relative balance of different *vasna*-s:

> Appreciating the pupil's eagerness to be enlightened, the preceptor replies unto him with great condescension and pleasure, thus: 'May the pupil listen with all attention. The power of discriminating between the body, (which is after all a concomitant of *Avidya*), and the Atman, (attainable only through a knowledge of *Brahmavidya*), is not developed, as a result of the influence of peculiar groups of *vasana*-s (impressions) left by actions of a highly meritorious type, as well as of countless wicked deeds of various kinds and of a variegated character, performed in the course of countless incarnations of a low type. For that reason alone, the delusion relating to the body and the Atman, gets more and more confirmed, (leading to the *Jiva* mistaking the body for the Atman). There results (for the *Jiva*), the floundering in worldly existence alone, due to the potent influence of the *vasana* of delusion, such as, "I am an ignorant man," "I am possessed of a little knowledge," "I am the Jiva," and "I am of the aspect of intense misery, swirling in worldly existence, ever since beginningless time." There is no means, at whatsoever point of time, for the discontinuance (of such miserable existence). Having enjoyed sensual pleasures, which are false and transitory like dreams, and incessantly hankered after various and countless unattainable desires, (the *Jiva*) wanders about, ever discontented. After assuming various and wonderful, gross and subtle, superior and inferior bodies,

[218] For instance, *Mahopanishad*, V. 144-157; *Brahma-Sutra-s*, 2.1.32, 33.
[219] *Yogashikhopanishad*, I, 20-24.

countless in number, and enjoying the fruits of actions already commenced, appropriate to the respective bodies (assumed), that are various, variegated and many, of a pleasurable or painful kind, there is produced, in consequence, the tendency to indulge, over and over again, in the enjoyment of sensual pleasures and the enjoyment of the fruits of the respective actions, for the inner and the outer senses (of the *Jiva*), fully permeated with the multitudes of *vasana*-s left by the enjoyment of the fruits of their respective actions. There is not also produced, at any time, even the slightest tendency in the direction of renunciation through abstinence from worldly existence. On account of that, even what is reprehensible and should be completely avoided (as poison), assumes the aspect of what is wholesome and conducive to well-being. Owing to the perverted nature of the delusion relating to worldly existence, which prevails from beginningless time, even what is wholesome assumes the aspect of what is reprehensible. Hence the proclivity of the mind towards doing what is eagerly sought, in the case of all *Jiva*-s (beings); this wholesome mental proclivity becomes perverted (and tends towards unwholesome actions and induced improper desires). Forsooth, mental proclivity in the direction of enjoying the Bliss of the Brahman, which is by no means capable of being vitiated (by the influence of impure *vasana*-s), is not generated at all, for the reason that the knowledge of the real form (of the Brahman) is altogether absent. Even the tendency in the direction of knowing what the Brahman is (and what the Bliss of the Brahman is), is altogether absent. This is also due to the absence of investigation as to what constitutes bondage and what liberation. (*Should it be asked*), "*Why is this so?*"—(*the answer is*), "*That is due to the preponderance of ignorance.*" (*Should it be asked further*), "*Wherefore is the preponderance of ignorance?*"—(*the answer is*), "*That is so, for the reason that the Vasana-s relating to the exclusive devotion* (*to the Paramatman, Narayana*), *the real knowledge* (*of the Brahman*), *and through detachment* (*from everything apart from the Brahman*), *have not been cultivated, and are altogether absent.*" (*Should there be the question again*), "*Why are they absent?*"—(*the answer is*), "*For the reason that the inner and the outer senses have been exceedingly vitiated,* (*due to the influence of impure vasana-s*)." (Query): "From what has been said above, what sort of expedient should be resorted to, for the crossing over of the ocean of worldly existence?" The preceptor replied unto him, (the pupil), thus: "As a result of the consummation of the fruits of highly meritorious deeds, persistently practised from birth to birth, and in accordance with the precepts laid down in all the *Vedas*, *Shastra*-s, codified systems of knowledge and treatises bearing on the profound secrets of the *Vedanta*, there is brought about association with the righteous. Therefrom is generated the power of discrimination, relating to conforming to the ordinances, bearing on prescriptions and prohibitions. Thence is generated the proclivity to righteous conduct. Through righteous conduct is brought

about the destruction of all sin. Thence the inner and the outer senses attain transparent purity" . . . .[250]

Thus, I do not commence my quest for knowledge because of "the preponderance of ignorance"; ignorance predominates because the *vasna*-s for knowledge are absent; they are absent because the senses have been vitiated by their absence! But why did I commit the original evil deed which then produced evil *vasna*-s which in turn led to more evil deeds? His "*lila*," is it? His sport"? I have not seen another word that is as misplaced as *lila* is in this context. What a cruel conception we have of the Absolute if we believe that He makes us suffer out of "sport." The Absolute, a sadist, is He?

But let us not be too finicky, let us assume that for some reason or the other at a moment in time the accumulated evil outweighs the accumulated good in my *karma*-ledger and that this is what predisposes me to perpetrating further evil and thus increasing my negative balance. *How is it that I begin rectifying the balance at some point of time?* Is it that the Absolute—that undifferentiated, pure consciousness—suddenly takes mercy on a sinner, that He autonomously decides that the negative balance is exceeding the permissible limits and should now begin to get rectified? If this is indeed the case then He must be a capricious accountant, in that He grants me and not another His grace, that He grants it to me at one moment and not earlier or later.

"The desire for liberation," explains the *Paingala Upanishad* (2.11), "arises in human beings at the end of many births through the ripening of their past virtuous conduct," and that's that. But as we started from a point at which I had a negative balance in the *karma*-ledger, this "explanation" must be rooted in the physics of *karmic*-matter. It must be the case, must it not, that the *karmic*-effects of evil deeds have a shorter half-life than those of good deeds? Is that it then that the whole set-up runs in accordance with some difference-equations?

Let that pass too. Let us assume that somehow the trend was reversed, that the "desire for liberation" arose in me, that then, in accordance with the *Gita*, 7.19, at the end of many births, I at last gain the great knowledge. Now, *when is it that I depart to join Brahman?* The *Chandogya Upanishad* (6.14.2) says that it all depends on when I leave my body—"for him (the one who has realized) there is a delay so long as he is not delivered (from the body); then he will become one with Brahman."

Well, *at what moment do I leave the body then?*

The first explanation is the sort of tautology with which we have become familiar. It all depends on whether or not the mission the Lord assigned you has been fulfilled; if it has, you ascend, if it hasn't, you stay: "Then after that (when his mission is fulfilled) he (the Sun) will ascend higher up (as Brahman) not to rise and set again, but he will be alone existing in his

[illegible]

own Self...," says *Chandogya*, 3.11.1. And the *Brahma-Sutra*-s (3.3.32) generalize this bit of information: "Those who have a mission to fulfil continue in the corporeal state as long as the mission (set for them) demands it." Thus, why do realized souls like Apaantaratamas, Vasishtha, Bhrigu, Sanatakumara, Daksha, Narada, etc., not ascend the moment they have realized Brahman, why are they reborn again and again even after they have obtained the liberating-knowledge? "Because the mission assigned to them has not yet been accomplished." When will we know that their mission has been accomplished? "When they have ascended!"[251]

The second "explanation" is not just the *sort of* tautology with which we have become familiar, it is the familiar tautology *itself*. The *jnanin*, we are told, will ascend when his *karma* have been exhausted: " . . . the (enlightened) man merges in Brahman," say the *Brahma-Sutra*-s (4.1.19), "after exhausting the other two, (viz. merit and demerit that have started fruition), by experiencing (their results in the present life)." How come? After all, knowledge does not spring up all of a sudden, is it not acquired gradually over many births, by the slow attenuation of all balances in the *karma*-ledger? The very fact that I come upon the realization of the Absolute at a particular moment surely means that is precisely the moment when my *karma*-ledger has reached the critical magnitude required for Release? What is this second exhaustion of *karma* that is needed? And do the Upanishads not say again and again that once knowledge dawns it itself burns away all the remaining *karma*? Does Krishna in the *Gita* (4.37) not echo them and tell us, "As kindled fire reduces fuel to ashes, O Arjuna, so does the fire of knowledge reduce all *karma* to ashes"? You are right up to a point, but you see, explains *Sutra*, 4.1.15, when knowledge dawns and is said to burn away all the remaining *karma* "only those past (virtues and vices) get destroyed which have not begun to bear fruit (in this lifetime)"; therefore, those that have already begun to bear fruit will ensure that the *jnanin* lives till he dies, "for death is set as the limit of waiting for liberation," concludes the same *Sutra*.[252]

All right, all right, the *jnanin* must live till he dies. But then why are so many of them *reborn* many times over even after they have realized Brahman in this life-time? That, as has already been explained, is because the mission that was set for them has not yet been completed. So, contrary to what the Upanishad says, death is *not*, after all, "the limit of waiting for liberation," is it?

[251] Shankara and Ramanuja parrot the tautology verbatim; compare *Brahma Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya*, *op. cit.*, pp. 701-705, and *Vedanta-Sutras with Ramanuja's Commentary*, *op. cit.*, p. 651.

[252] Our friends Shankara and Ramanuja once again parrot all this; see *Brahma Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya*, *op. cit.*, pp. 839-846, and *Vedanta-Sutras with Ramanuja's Commentary*, *op. cit.*, pp. 721-727.

MORE THAN A PASTIME

It would be a grave error to think that constructing these black and empty boxes is just an idle pastime of the seers and the philosophers, that inventing these concepts is just an innocuous game. The concepts and the circularities serve a definite social function.

Rita endows all that happens with a higher, inscrutable "purpose," *maya* helps turn people's attention away from the empirical order, *karma* helps explain privation.

The rich can now rest assured that the poor have only themselves to blame for their present state or nothing but the latter's past misdeeds have landed them where they are. They can now congratulate themselves as having been certified as "meritorious-on-balance" by the Lord, the ledger-keeper, himself. After all, does Krishna not say that He has Himself authored the caste-hierarchies (*Gita*, 4.13), that He Himself allots individuals to different castes and assigns them different duties according to their past *karma* and "according to their qualities born of nature" (*Gita*, 18.41-44)? Does He not Himself exalt the rulers when He says, "...among men I am the King..." (*Gita*, 10.27)? Does He not Himself say that He has by His Own Hands put us where we are, that our exalted status is but a reflection of His own glory? After all, what else does He mean when He says (*Gita*, 10.41) "Whatever being there is great, prosperous, powerful, that know though to be a product of a part of My splendour"?

And is it not best for those who are down below to just busy themselves with doing the duties that have fallen to their lot? Does Krishna not tell us (*Gita*, 18.45) "one should not abandon, O Kaunteya, that duty to which one is born..."? Does He not admonish us: it is not proper that you should bemoan having to perform that duty which is your lot according to your caste (*Gita*, ?.31)? Does He not assure us (in 18.47) that "by doing that duty which has been enjoined on you by the arrangement of the four castes, having regard to innate, natural characteristics, you will not incur any sin"? Does He not imply (in 2.31,33,33) that performing one's caste duties comes above the question of hurting others or oneself, that their neglect is sin? Does He not say (in verse 18.46) that we should serve Him by performing the tasks allotted to us?

But what if I suffer even as I toil, what if the promised rewards of performing my assigned duties as a *Shudra* in the spirit of serving the Lord Himself, what if they never come my way? No matter, keep toiling away, don't lift your nose from the grindstone. After all, has Krishna not said (*Gita*, 2.40), "There is no loss of effort here, there is no harm. Even a little of this devotion delivers one from great fear"? But what if I perform my assigned duties for years on end, for births after births, but then the stamina fails me? What then, would I not have lost both worlds—I would have toiled away at slavish tasks, thus forgoing comfort and rest in this life, and having abandoned the assigned duty at that future date, forfeited comfort and rest in fu[illegible] incarnations [illegible]

No, no, do not despair. Remember what was said at the beginning of this chapter—*Karma* is a mysterious ledger, if per chance you do not obtain the fruit of your toil now, nothing is lost; you'll be well rewarded at some future time:

> O Partha, neither in this world nor in the next is there destruction for him; none, verily, who does good, My son, ever comes to grief. Having attained to the worlds of the righteous and having dwelt there for eternal years, he who failed in *yoga* is reborn in a house of the pure and wealthy. Else he is born in a family of wise *yogin*-s. . . .There he gains touch with knowledge that was acquired in the former body and strives more than ever for perfection, O, son of the Kurus: By that very former practice is he borne along, though unwilling. . . .Verily, a *yogin* who strives with assiduity, purified from sins and perfected in the course of many births, then reaches the Supreme Goal.[253]

What more would you want? In the end you'll get the great boon even if you are unwilling. Do you not remember the case of Vaamdeva, asks Shankara? The *Aitareya Upanishad* (4.5) clearly tells us that Vaamdeva acquired the supreme knowledge while still in his mother's womb: "It only shows," says Shankara, "that knowledge may emerge in a succeeding birth as a result of practices gone through in an earlier life, for a child in the womb itself cannot possibly undertake any practice that is usually gone through in this world."[254] What greater proof do you want of the fact that you will eventually be rewarded for your labours? Strive on, therefore, do your assigned duty. . . And what is your assigned duty? It is, implies the *Gita* (18.48), the duty to which you are born, And what was the duty to which the *Shudra*-s were born when Brahman made them, as the *Subala Upanishad* (1) says, out of His feet?

"Service is the duty of the *Shudra*," says the *Gita* (18.44) for that is his nature. "One occupation only," echoes the great Manu in his sacred *Laws* "the Lord prescribed to the *Shudra*, to serve meekly ever these three (other) castes," (*Manu*, 1.91). The King himself must order the *Shudra* to serve the twice-born castes (*Manu*, 8.410) for if the two lower castes deviate from doing what has been assigned to them "they would throw this whole world into confusion" (*Manu*, 9.418). "To serve Brahmins learned in the Vedas, householders and famous (for their virtues) is the highest duty of a *Shudra* which leads to beatitude" (*Manu*, 18.334). "The service of Brahmins alone is declared (to be) an excellent occupation for a *Shudra*; for whatever else besides this he may perform will bear him no fruit" (*Manu*, 10.123). And remember, a *Shudra* who is "pure, the servant of his betters, gentle in his speech and free from pride and always seeks refuge with Brahmins attains (in his next life) a higher caste," (*Manu* 10.335). What could be better?

[253] *Gita*, 6.40-45.
[254] *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya*, *op. cit.*, p. 809.

But what about *this* life? What if he is unable to find service with the twice-born and his wife and sons are dying of hunger? Well, in that exceptional circumstance, Manu relents, "he may maintain himself by handicrafts" (*Manu*, 10.99) but even then let him follow only "those mechanical occupations and those various practical arts by following which the twice-bornar e (best) served," (*Manu*, 10.100). Remember, however, at all times that one from a lower caste cannot take on the duties of one from a higher the general rule caste (*Manu*, 10.96, 97).

But what if by sweating it out, by toiling day and night, he saves a little? May he not set himself up in, say, another trade? "No collection of wealth must be made by a *Shudra* even though he be able (to do it)," says the unbending Manu, "for a *Shudra* who has acquired wealth gives pain to Brahmins," (*Manu*,10.129). But what if he *does* acquire some wealth? "A wife, a son, and a slave, these three are declared to have no property; the wealth which they earn is for him to whom they belong" (*Manu*, 9.416) and so "a Brahmin may confidently seize the goods of his *Shudra*; for as the latter can have no property, his master may take his possessions," (*Manu*, 9.417).

You mean, there just is nothing that the *Shudra* can do in this life to break out of the slavery to which he has been born? Don't be sentimental, what can he or, for that matter, *you* do "for he (the *Shudra*) was created by the Self-Existent (Himself) to be the slave of a Brahmin" (*Manu*, 8.413) and, therefore, even the Brahmin can do nothing for him: "A *Shudra*, though emancipated by his master, is not released from servitude; since that (servitude) is innate in him, who can set him free from it?" (*Manu*, 8.414).[255]

But must we obey these "laws," these *obiter dicta*? You bet your life. After all, notes Manu (*Manu*, 1.58), Brahman "Himself composed these Institutes (and) Himself taught them. . . ."

Hence does a black box like *karma* perform its assigned duties. Hence are esoteric tautologies brought down to earth.

[255]The other great law-givers, Apastambha, Gautama, Vasishtha, Baudhayana, follow Manu closely on all this; c.f., *The Sacred Laws of the Aryas*, Parts 1 & 2, Volumes 2 and 14.
G. B... Max Mueller (ed.),

9

CONTRADICTIONS, AND HOW TO BURY THEM

I have presented and have argued on the basis of what appears to me to be the dominant world-view in the Upanishads. Anyone having even a marginal acquaintance with the Upanishads or with the acrimonious debates among our philosophers—debates that ranged over centuries and were seldom resolved—will know that it is easy enough to pick out passages which run counter to the world-view that I have regarded as the dominant view.

That texts such as the *Vedas* (and the Upanishads are parts of them) should contain contradictory passages is not surprising. Each of them represents accumulations over hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Some of the sectarian Upanishads were compiled as late as the fifteenth century. Ever since the texts gained currency no one has been audacious enough to sift them and bring out a consistent corpus.

This state of affairs in the texts corresponds to and reflects what we know about the mode of production of the period over which the texts were compiled. In those distant centuries people lived in scattered, self-contained communities. The communities had little contact with each other. Over the centuries, as the mode of production ossified and as, with it, social relations became rigid, contacts among members of different strata even within a single community became minimal as well as formal. The result was that viewpoints, beliefs, practices could now sprout in one region, in one community or in one group within a community quite independently of what was happening elsewhere; they could take root, sprout, be nursed and flourish with minimal contact with other viewpoints in the social or geographical neighbourhood, each group nursing its variant in its own little corner.

There is another, purely intellectual, reason for the persistence of different starting points and of different doctrines. As has been noted earlier, the inner core of the doctrines, indeed their very heart, dealt with matters that were not verifiable. A Shankara or a Ramanuja would start with one starting point—that reality is non-dual—or another—that it is dual—and then spin out its implications. Some of the philosophers were perspicacious both in working out the implications of their own initial assumptions and in spotting the inconsistent inferences drawn by their rivals in other schools.

Their commentaries were often sharp, witty and novel. Some of the debates had important by-products—for instance, some of them left behind important contributions to Logic, to the theory of perception, to the theory of Knowledge. But, as the initial assumptions were all non-verifiable, the controversies raged on and on and were never resolved. As we have seen in Chapter 8, they just could not be settled for they were, as we recalled Lenin saying, controversies among those who maintain that the Devil is yellow and those who insist that he is green. The one mystery that you can't unravel, it has been correctly said, is one that isn't even there.

One of the principal reasons that accounts for the longevity of texts such as the *Vedas* and the Upanishads is precisely the fact that they are warehouses storing all sorts of diverse and even contradictory passages and doctrines. Indeed, this feature characterizes Hinduism itself and has helped it contain every challenge that has thus far assailed it. Whatever other compulsions there might have been to leave Hinduism or to throw away the texts, doctrinal differences just could not be a reason: as it was always possible to find a passage or two in the chaotic *Vedas* and even in the somewhat more systematic Upanishads and the *Gita*, as it was always possible to find a passage or two and often many more to support your point of view, where could the compulsion be for abandoning the texts or Hinduism itself on doctrinal grounds?

Even as the persistence of different points of view ensured durability, this very persistence and the effort to explain away the contradictions had many other consequences also. In this chapter I will recount for the reader some of the types of contradictions that one encounters in the *prasthana treyi* and the ways that were adopted to cover them up. In the next chapter I shall enumerate some of the consequences that these contradictions and the efforts to cover them up had; in particular, I shall invite the reader to see how these efforts laid the foundations for fideism, for an anti-rational stance.

CONTRADICTIONS

Let us start with Brahman Himself. *Is He pure, undifferentiated consciousness or does He have parts and attributes?* We have already come across several passages in which we are told that Brahman is an undifferentiated consciousness. "There is no diversity whatever in it," says the *Brihad-Aranyaka Upanishad*,[1] "as a lump of salt is without interior or exterior, entirely and purely saline in taste, even so is the Self without interior or exterior, entire and pure intelligence alone."[2] "Whenever the aspirant creates (even) a little difference in this Brahman," warns the *Taittiriyopanishad*, "he is struck with fear," and Brahman appears to him as "a great terror;"[3] nay, he goes

Ibid., 4.5.13.

"from death to death," says the *Katha Upanishad*.[4] It is this position that the *Brahma-Sutra*-s summarize when they state, "not even according to place can Brahman have a twofold characteristic for everywhere (It is taught to be without attributes)," when they state that the various differences mentioned occasionally in the Upanishads are each negated individually, that formlessness, partlessness is "the dominant note" of the Upanishads,[5] when they recall that the Upanishads declare Brahman to be "consciousness alone,"[6] when they affirm that the apparent differences are like the reflections of the single sun in several different pots[7] and when they assert that we do not always see this partless integrity simply because "since Brahman has entered into the limiting adjuncts, It seems to participate in their increase and decrease."[8]

But the Upanishads also speak of Him as having "four feet,"[9] "eight hoofs, sixteen parts,"[10] of "ten organs, nay hundreds of them" being yoked to Him, of His being "tens and thousands, many and infinite,"[11] of His having three distinct worlds as His body,[12] of His having *two* distinct forms, "gross and subtle, mortal and immortal, limited and unlimited, defined and undefined,"[13] of His having *three* distinct forms. . . .

> However, there are three forms of this formless Brahman thus: the indivisible, the divisible and the partly divisible and partly indivisible.
>
> That which is Truth, Wisdom and Bliss, that is actionless, non-attached, all-pervading, intensely subtle, facing all directions, non demonstrable, and immortal, this is the indivisible form of the Brahman.
>
> Then with the aid of what co exists with (the ignorance of the Atman and is known as *Vidya*), *mulaprakriti* (primordial matter) and *maya* (Illusion), that is of a red, white and black colour (partaking of the *guna*-s), *Maheshvara*, the co-existing God, who is of a black and brown colour, holds sway (in his capacity as overlord, over the state of illusion and its concomitants flowing out of the ignorance of the Atman). This then is the divisible form of the Brahman.
>
> Then this *Maheshvara*, who had outgrown (his original) form due to his penance, replete with wisdom, desires as follows: 'May I become many! may I bring forth progeny!' Then, from this *Ishvara*, who was performing severe austerities and had taken the vow of Truth, there came into being the three letters (*Akara*, *Ukara*, and *Makara*); also the three *Vyaahritis* (*Bhur*, *Bhuvar* and *Svar*), the three-footed *Gayatri*, the three *Vedas*, the three gods (Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra), the three castes (the twice-born ones or the three colours, red, white and black) and the three sacrificial fires (*Deksina*, *Garhapatya* and *Ahavaniya*) came into existence. This great God is endowed with all kinds of supremacy, pervades

[4] *Kathopanishad*, 4.11.
[5] *Brahma-Sutra*-s, 3.2.14.
[6] *Ibid.*, 3.2.16.
[7] *Ibid.*, 3.2.15, 18, 19, 25.
[8] *Ibid.*, 3.2.20.
[9] *Chandogyopanished*, 3.18.2.
[10] *Ibid.*, 4.5.
[11] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, 2.5.19.
[12] *Ibid.*, 1.3.22.
[13] *Ibid.*, 2.3.1.

through all, and is well established in the heart of all beings. He is full of *maya* and owes his form entirely to *maya*; he is Brahma; he is Vishnu; he is Rudra; he is Indra; he is all the gods and all the beings; he alone is afore; he alone is behind; he alone is to the left; he is alone to the right; he is alone below, he alone is above; he alone is all. Then, of this Lord, who is playing with his *Atmik* power, who is full of compassion towards his devotees, whose form is of *Dattatreya*, whose beautiful body is without clothing of any kind; who has four arms resembling the petals of the lotus; and whose form is not fearful and reveals his sinlessness. This then is the partly divisible and partly indivisible form (of the Brahman).[14]

The *Kaushitaki's* account of Brahman's form is at a different level of discourse altogether. It speaks of Brahman having a form, a head and a belly (the latter two presumably not being a part of His overall form) which consist respectively of the *Rig*, *Sama* and *Yajur Vedas*.[15] Just as there is no agreement about the number of His forms or about what constitutes each of the forms, there is no agreement about what precisely His parts are. The *Chandogya Upanishad* says that the four directions taken individually, earth, ocean, atmosphere, sky (the latter two being distinct), breath, eye, ear, mind, fire, sun, moon, lightning—that each of these constitutes one-sixteenth of Him.[16]

The *Trisikhibrahmanopanishad* gives a different list: life, faith, ether, air, light, water, earth, organs, mind, food, vigour, austerity, *Mantra*-s, saction, the world and name.[17]

Similarly, while He is most often referred to as *nirguna*, *saguna* descriptions are not lacking. In typical passages the sixth *adhyaya* of the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* itself affirms both points of view:

The one God, hidden in all things,
All-pervading, the Inner Soul of all things,
The overseer of deeds, in all things abiding,
The witness, the sole thinker, *devoid of qualities* . . . .[18]

He who is the maker of all, the all-knower, self-sourced,
Intelligent, the author of time, *possessor of qualities*, omniscient,
Is the ruler of Primary Matter and of the spirit, the lord of qualities,

The cause of reincarnation and of liberation of continuance and of bondage.[19]

Some of the attributes that are ascribed to Brahman can be harmonized

[14] *Sandilyopanishad*, 3.1.3-6.
[15] *Kaushitakyupanishad*, 1.7.
[16] *Chandogyopanishad*, 4.5.2, 6.3, 7.3, 8.3.
[17] *Trisikhibrahmanopanishad*, *mantra*, 1-3.
[18] *Shvetashvataropanishad*, VI. 11.
[19] *Ibid.*, VI. 16.

with the description of Him as the *nirguna*, pure consciousness. In this group come attributes such as fullness, omnipresence, immanence, vastness, spotless, beginningless, endless, tranquil, unchanging and, therefore, immortal, etc.

There are a few others which can also be harmonized with the *nirguna* descriptions but which require an additional clause each. Thus, for instance, when the *Mundaka Upanishad* tells us that the Brahman is all-knowing, all-wise,[20] the description can be grafted on to the *nirguna* conception provided we take it to imply that He knows all about Himself; i.e., the expressions can be taken to refer only to self-knowledge, to wisdom about His own nature. Similarly, when the *Subala Upanishad* tells us that the Absolute is free from all evil,[21] it can be made to accord with the *nirguna* conception provided we remember that He is free from all good too. If, as the *Shvetashvatara* says,[22] He is "irreproachable" then we must add that He is also non-praisable. Or, when the *Maitri*[23] tells us that He is "brilliant," that may or may not be true. He may as well be an undifferentiated darkness. To insist that He is brilliant would imply that an *observer* saw Him and is telling us that He is brilliant and not a darkness; that is, the assertion would itself imply duality—the Brahman and an observer; indeed it would imply a third and a fourth too, the third being the condition called "brilliance" as distinguished from the fourth, the condition called "darkness."

A third category of descriptions just cannot be reconciled with the purely non-dualist position that dominates the Upanishads as a whole. Thus, to call Him the "Constant among the inconstants," the "Intelligent among the intelligences,"[24] itself implies that there *are* some *others* who are inconstant or who constitute or possess assorted intelligences. Once the crack is opened a flood of other adjectives flows in: heavenly,[25] flaming,[26] fearless,[27] loving,[28] kindly,[29] bountiful,[30] sorrowless, blissful,[31] and so on and on. Soon enough these give way to grand and fanciful descriptions of resplendent deities who now take the place of the Absolute. This is specially so in the sectarian Upanishads.

Having denied the existence of anything apart from the Brahman, the undifferentiated pure consciousness, the Upanishads proceed to identify Brahman with a host of concrete, palpable things, capacities, concepts, etc.

[20] *Mundakopanishad*, I.1.9, II.2.7.
[21] *Subalopanishad*, VII.
[22] *Shvetashvataropanishad*, VI. 19.
[23] *Maitrepanishad*, VI. 25.
[24] *Kathopanishad*, V. 13; *Shvetashvataropanishad*, VI. 2, 13; *Maitrepanishad*, VI. 38.
[25] *Mundakopanishad*, II.1.2, III 1.7.
[26] *Ibid.*, II.2.2.
[27] *Prashnopanishad*, VI.7.
[28] *Sarasvatirahasyopanishad*, 58.
[29] *Shvetashvataropanishad* III. 11, IV. 14-16, V. 14.
[30] *Ibid.*, III. 11.
[31] *Maitrepanishad*, VI. 23.

Thus, He is said to be the breath[32]; sun[33]; food[34]; ether[35]; lightning[36]; sight, speech, hearing, as well as understanding[37]; mind[38]; this entire world[39]; everything that exists[40]; the heart, fire, rain, wind, earth, matter, all entities[41]. While a very large number of examples can be given to illustrate this identification of Brahman or parts of Him with entities and capacities, two composite pictures will have to suffice:

> Fire is His head; His eyes, the moon and sun;
> The regions of space, His ears; His voice, the revealed *Vedas*;
> Wind, His breath (*prana*); His heart, the whole world. Out of his feet,
> The earth. Truly, He is the Inner Soul (Atman) of all.[42]
> That surely is *Agni* (fire). That is *Aditya* (the sun).
> That is *Vayu* (the wind), and That is the moon.
> That surely is the pure. That is Brahma.
> That is the waters. That is *Prajapati* (Lord of Creation).
> Thou art woman. Thou art man.
> Thou art the youth and the maiden too.
> Thou as an old man totterest with a staff.
> Being born, thou becomest facing in every direction.
> Thou art the dark-blue bird and the green (parrot) with red eyes.
> Thou hast the lightning as Thy child. Thou art the seasons and the seas.
> Having no beginning, thou dost abide with immanence,
> Wherefrom all beings are born.[43]

In other passages, often in the same Upanishad and in the very same *adhyaya*, we are told that the entities are not the Brahman Himself, that they are Narayana as well as His symbol,[44] His form,[45] the things in which He

[32] *Chandogyopanishad*, I. 11.4-9; *Taittiriyopanishad*, III. 1; *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, I. 6.3.

[33] *Chandogyopanishad*, I. 11.4-9; *Prashnopanishad*, II. 5. But according to another passage *only a part* of Him is in the sun: *Maitrepanishad*, VI. 35, VI. 4. Having become the Brahman, the sun is declared to be the *source* of time (*Maitrepanishad*, VI. 4), to be time itself as well as to be timeless (*ibid.*, VI. 14, 15) and, finally, to be the *name* of time (*ibid.*, VI. 16).

[34] *Chandogyopanishad*, I. 11.4-9; *Taittiriyopanishad*, III. 1; *Maitrepanishad*, VI. 1, VI. 10-13.

[35] *Ibid.*, V. 1.

[36] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, V. 1.

[37] *Taittiriyopanishad*, III. 1.

[38] *Mundakopanishad*: III. 2.2, *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, I. 5.3. Recall the passages cited earlier castigating the very same mind which is now said to be Brahman.

[39] *Chandogyopanishad*, III. 14.1; *Shvetashvataropanishad*, III. 15; *Maitrepanishad*, IV. 6, V. 1.

[40] *Taittiriyopanishad*, II. 6; *Mundakopanishad*, II. 1.10.

[41] *Prashnopanishad*, II. 1.

[42] *Mundakopanishad*, II. 1.4.

[43] *Shvetashvataropanishad*, IV. 2-4.

[44] *Maitrepanishad*, VI. 5,6.

[45] *Subalopanishad*, VI. 1.

dwells.[46] Indeed we are warned, in fact, that we fail to perceive Him precisely because we focus on these manifestations of His, manifestations that are only incomplete parts of Him.[47]

"But, surely, you are making too much of these different descriptions of the Absolute. The Upanishads are quite clear on this matter. Brahman is *nirguna*. The auspicious qualities as well as the identifications with the sun, etc., are affirmed merely as aids to meditation. Is this not the clear import of the texts? In *Chandogya* (3.19.1), for instance, we are told, 'The sun is Brahman.' But the subsequent verses go on to explain the sequence of creation and clearly mention the sun *as one of the things* that emerged in this sequence. And in the end (3.19.4) we are clearly told, 'he who. . .reverences the sun *as* Brahman, the prospect is that pleasant shouts will come unto him and delight him. . . .' Where is the ground for confusing the sun with Brahman? Is the sun not being presented as just an aid to meditation? The same goes for other entities, 'He who *meditates upon* the organ of speech *as* Brahman. . . He who *meditates upon* resolve *as* Brahman. . .,' notes the *Chandogya* (7.2.2, 7.4.3), where is the scope for confusion? The *Brahma-Sutra*-s make matters even more explicit. *Sutra* 1.1.25 clearly states that metres such as *Gayatri* are equated with Brahman 'for the dedication of the mind is taught in that way.' *Sutra* 1.2.29 recalls the opinion of Aashmarthya that the Absolute is sometimes conceived of as spatially limited so as to enable His worshipper to comprehend Him with greater ease. *Sutra*-s 1.2.30, 31 record the opinions of Baadari and Jaimini to the same effect that the spatial limitations and the super-impositions are conceived so as to facilitate meditation. Similarly, *Sutra* 3.2.33 states that Brahman's magnitude is spoken of 'just like the feet (of the mind or of space) (or the quarters of the *Karshapana*),' 'for the sake of intellectual grasp.' The import of *Sutra* 4.1.5 is no different; there too we are told that 'the sun, etc., are to be *looked upon as* Brahman because of the consequent exaltation.' Thus, there is just no doubt about the basic position of the Upanishads—that Brahman is *nirguna* but as, to recall what Shankara says, 'the scripture follows the line of understanding of the common people,' as it wants to help them in their meditation, etc., it presents Brahman as spatially limited, as having attributes, etc.; and, of course, Brahman Himself out of compassion and love for His devotees often takes on forms that are more within the grasp of the devotees. Do you not recall how in the *Gita*, when Arjuna is overwhelmed by the universal form of Krishna, Krishna soon resumes His human form, a limited form marked by auspicious qualities of various kinds? The Upanishads often go out of their way to state that the *nirguna* form is the highest, the true form of Brahman. Even from the point of view of meditation the view of the Upanishads leaves little room for confusion. Does the *Chandogya* (3.14.1) not say, 'after departure from this world, a man becomes what he

[46] *Chandogyopanishad*, VI. 11-15, V. 12-17, 18.2; *Maitrepanishad*, VI. 6, 35; *Subalopanishad*, VI. 1, VIII. 1.

[47] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, I. 4.7.

had willed to be (*i.e.*, meditated on)? Does Krishna not say in the *Gita* (8.6), 'remembering whatever object, at the end, he leaves the body, that alone is reached by him, O son of Kunti'? And as the texts have earlier declared the *nirguna* to be the highest, are these verses not exhorting us to meditate only on the *nirguna* for only then would we reach the highest? The *Brahma-Sutra*, 3.3.57, puts all doubts at rest by explicitly stating, 'the meditation on the whole is of greater importance just as in the case of sacrifices.' In the face of all this why do you put the *saguna* and *nirguna* statements at par? How can you put them at par and then assert that they contradict each other?"

There is much to this argument. It is the line that a Shankara would take.[48] A reading of the Upanishads as a whole suggests this is to be the correct interpretation. It is precisely for this reason that I have taken this to be the dominant view and argued on its basis in the preceding chapters. But how would you convince Ramanuja about this and all the others who are lost in differing deities each of whom they regard as "the ocean of auspicious attributes"? And there are enough passages in the Upanishads which have served as handy pegs for these devotees. After all, in most instances when Brahman is identified with the sun or some other entity, the phrasing does not assert that the sun is Brahman merely for the purposes of meditation. Consider the sequence of assertions. In one breath we are told

> That which is beyond this world is without form and without ill. They who know That, become immortal; but others go only to sorrow.[49]

in the next that while He *has* two forms, only one is real

> There are, assuredly, two forms of Brahman: the formed and the formless. Now that which is formed, is unreal; that which is the formless is real, is Brahman, is light.[50]

but in the third breath He who had no form at all comes to have *all* forms

> Having bidden peace to all creatures, and having gone to the forest, then having put aside objects of sense, from out of one's own body one should perceive Him,
> Who has all forms, the golden one, all-knowing,
> The final goal, the only light, heat-giving,
> The thousand-rayed, the hundredfold revolving,
> Yon sun arises as the life of creatures.[51]

[48] See, for instance, *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya*, [illegible] (tr.), Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1972, pp. [illegible], 81, 128, 154-155, 175, 611-613, [illegible].
[49] *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, 3.10.
[50] *Maitrayani Upanishad*, 6.3; [illegible]

thing other than the soul *in* the soul.[60] While the standard position is the one stated in the *Mahavakya*, "*Aham Brahmasmi*"—I am Brahman, we are told again and again that it is *only upon the banishing of ignorance* that I *become* Brahman,[61] that the *Yogi* who *is* Brahman *becomes* Brahman upon realizing the nature of reality,[62] that the Atman is the *Paramatma* and at same the time that it is not,[63] that both are jointly dependent on a third.[64] And so on.

So many diverse assertions can be culled that, even though the identity of the Brahman and the Atman is the standard, most frequently held position, each of the following positions can also be affirmed on the basis of one or more passages: that the Atman merges into and becomes the Brahman at the banishment of ignorance, that it does so only at the dissolution of the *yuga*, that it never completely dissolves into Brahman, that even at the end of the *kalpa* it continues to exist along Brahman's side as a separate entity, that Atman is *based* on Brahman, that they—the Brahman and the Atman—are *interdependent*, that they are *jointly dependent* on a third. Similarly, sometimes I am told that I—the non-Atman—have to tear away the ignorance so that the Atman may merge into the Brahman, at other times that the Atman itself has to tear away the ignorance.[65]

Similar discrepancies mark accounts of the "real" nature of the Atman. Can it be slain? Is it made greater by good deeds, is it stained by evil deeds? Is it subject to distress, sorrow, agitation, etc.? We have already seen that the overwhelming number of passages in the Upanishads answer "no" to each of these questions. But contrary assertions are, once again, not wholly absent.

Yes, it can be slain:

> Devilish (*asurva*) are those worlds called,
> With blind darkness (*tamas*) covered o'er!
> Unto them, on deceasing, go
> Whatever folk are *slayers of the Self*.[66]

Yes, it *is* subject to distress, sorrow, pleasure, pain, agitation:

> (Query) 'What is the *Asura*, (demoniacal) proclivity?' (Answer): 'The

[60] *Prashnopanishad*, IV. 9. Contrast, for instance, *Subalopanishad*, VI. 1-14 which affirms that the Self is the seer as well as the seen etc., and *Kenopanishad*, I. 1-8 which asserts that the Self is not what is heard nor the ear which hears, but that which causes the ear to hear.

[61] For instance, *Tripura-tapinyupanishad*, V. 3; *Kaivalyopanishad*, 8-10; *Tripad-Vibhuti-Maha-Narayanopanishad*, VIII. 5,6; *Nrisimha-Tapinyupanishad*, *Uttara-Tapini*, VII. 11.15; *Rama-Tapinyopanishad*, *Uttara-Tapini*, II. 15-17.

[62] For instance, *Mandalabrahmanopanishad*, II. 5.1. *Nrisimha-Tapinyupanishad*, *Uttara-Tapini*, V. 3.

[63] *Atharvashiropanishad*, 41-4.

[64] *Maitreyopanishad*, VI. 3-6.

[65] For instance, *Nri simha Tapinyupanishad*, *Uttara-Tapini* VII. 11-15, *Rama Tapinyopanishad* [illegible]

[66] *Ishopanishad*, 3.

austere penance in propitiation of the celestials, Brahman, Vishnu, Ishana, Indra, Varuna and others, prompted by the desire for worldly affluence, wherein (the performer of the penance) *causes great distress to the Atman within himself*, through fasting, prayer, and offering of oblations to the sacrificial fire and through other austerities involving the outburst of violent passion, hatred, cruelty, pride and other vicious qualities,—that is the *Asura*. . . .'[67]

'O Maghavan, verily, this body is mortal. It has been appropriated by Death (*mrityu*). (But) it is the standing-ground of that deathless, bodiless Self (Atman). Verily, *he who is incorporate has been appropriated by pleasure and pain*. Verily, *there is no freedom from pleasure and pain for one while he is incorporate*. Verily, while one is bodiless, pleasure and pain do not touch him. . . . The wind is bodiless. Clouds, lightning, thunder—these are bodiless. Now as these, when they arise from yonder space and reach the highest light, appear each with its own form, even so that serene one, *when he rises up from this body and reaches the highest light, appears with his own form*. Such a one is the supreme person. There *such a one goes around laughing, sporting, having enjoyment with women or chariots or friends*, not remembering the appendage of this body. As a draft-animal is worked in a wagon, even so this spirit (*prana*) is yoked in this body.[68]

In the state of dream *the Self experiences happiness or sorrow* in the worlds created by his own *maya*. In the state of dreamless sleep in which all things disappear, overcome by darkness, *he experiences* happiness.[69] *The Self* associated with the body, the senses and the mind, the great sages declare, *is the enjoyer*. . . .[70]

Even as, on account of the agitation in the surface of the water, the reflection of the Sun is ruffled, *so also is the agitation of the Atman* (*brought about*) only through the admixture of Self consciousness. The travail of worldly existence is verily due to the mind. Hence should one purify it with great effort. . . .[71]

Is it bound by *karma*? The standard position is that it cannot be bound by it, that it is not affected by our deeds. But here is *Shvetashvatara* speaking about the *qualities* of the *Atman* and of *its* acts:

Coarse and fine, many in number,
The embodied one chooses forms according to *his own qualities*.
(Each) subsequent cause of his union with them is seen to be

[67] *Nir-Alambopanishad*, 34.
[68] *Chandogyopanishad*, VIII. 12.2.
[69] *Kaivalyopanishad*, 13.
[70] *Paingalopanishad*, IV. 3.
[71] *Varahopanishad*, III. 20.

> Because of *the quality of his acts and of himself.*[72]

and here is the *Jabalopanishad* telling us how the *self*, not I, the non-self, has to overcome the faults and the effects of the evil deeds of the sense organs:

> Thereafter Atri inquired of Yajnavalkya, 'How can I know that self which is infinite and unmanifested?' Yajnavalkya said (in reply), 'meditate on *avimukta* (for) the self which is infinite and unmanifested is established in *avimukta*.' (Atri then inquired) 'In what is *avimukta* established'? (Yajnavalkya answered) 'It is established in the middle of *Varana* and *Nasi*.' (Atri inquired) 'What is *Varana* and what is *Nasi*?' (Yajnavalkya answered) 'As *it overcomes* all the faults done by the sense organs it is called *Varana*; as *it destroys* all the evils done by the sense organs it is called *Nasi*.' (Atri asked) 'What is their abode?' (Yajnavalkya answered) 'It is the meeting-place of the eyebrows and the nose. It is the meeting-place of the world of gods and (the world) beyond. The same meeting-place the knowers of the Brahman worship as *sandhya*. So *avimukta* is to be meditated on. He who knows it gains the knowledge which makes for liberation. . . .'[73]

Is Atman the doer? Once again, the Upanishads leave one in doubt. Passages can be found which assert that it is the sole doer, some which assert that it is just the passive spectator, that it is not the one that slays, and still others which assert that it is not the doer at all, that it never changes from its state of tranquil calm.

In contrast to *Kena* I. 1-8 which have already been cited and in which we are told repeatedly that it is the Atman which propels all faculties to act out their functions and is thus the doer, in contrast to these we have the *Maitri* telling us:

> Verily, this Soul (Atman)—poets declare—wanders here on earth from body to body, unovercome, as it seems, by the bright or the dark fruits of action. He who on account of his unmanifestness, subtlety, imperceptibility, incomprehensibility, and selflessness is (apparently) unabiding and a doer is the unreal—*he, truly, is not a doer*, and he is abiding. Verily, he is pure, steadfast and unswerving, stainless, unagitated, desireless, *fixed like a spectator*, and self-abiding. As an enjoyer of righteousness, he covers himself with a veil made of qualities; (but) he remains fixed![74]

Having got into this difficulty, the difficulty of having asserted that the Atman is *not* the doer and is *not* overcome by the fruits of its actions, the

[72]*Shvetashvataropanishad*, V. 12; also *Maitreyanishad*, III. 1. [partly cut off]

Upanishads have at once to invent a new entity—the *bhutatman*, the elemental soul—which *is* the doer and which *is* tainted by the fruits of its actions:

> Then they said: 'Sir, if thus you describe the greatness of this Soul, there is still another, different one. Who is he, called soul, who, being overcome by the bright or the dark fruits of action, enters a good or an evil womb, so that his course is downward or upward and he wanders around, overcome by the pairs of opposites?'
>
> (Then he said:) 'There is indeed another, different soul, called "the elemental soul" (*bhutatman*)—he who, being overcome by the bright or the dark fruits of action, enters a good or an evil womb, so that his course is downward or upward and he wanders around, overcome by the pairs of opposites.' . . .
>
> This (elemental soul), verily, is overcome by Nature's qualities.
>
> Now, because of being overcome, he goes on to confusedness; because of confusedness, he sees not the blessed Lord, the causer of action, who stands within oneself. Borne along and defiled by the stream of qualities, unsteady, wavering, bewildered, full of desire, distracted, this one goes on to the state of self-conceit. In thinking 'This is I' and 'That is mine,' he binds himself with his self, as does a bird with a snare.[75]

Attempts such as these to solve the problem by inventing new entities do not get far. In this partiçular instance, for example, one has to answer a new question: why is Atman yoked to this *bhutatman*, to this elemental soul? No answer is given in this or any other Upanishad just as in other cases there is no answer to the question, "why is the Atman yoked to a body in the first place?"

The *Shvetashvatara* using a famous similie that recurs often in the Upanishads pictures, as we saw in the preceding chapter, the Atman, not as the active doer or the enjoyer but as the passive spectator:

> Two birds, fast-bound companions,
> Clasp close the self-same tree.
> Of these two, the one eats sweet fruit,
> The other looks on without eating.[76]

This passive witness in the *Shvetashvatara* is declared to be impotent over the cause of pleasure and pain,[77] and yet to be the one whose *qualities* and the qualities of *whose* acts determine its next incarnation.[78] While declaring that the Absolute must be known as existing *within* the self,[79] the Upanishad also declares that the Absolute, the soul and the phenomenal world are dis-

[75]*Maitrepanishad*, 3.1.1; see also *Shvetashvataropanishad*, 4.6 and *Mundakopani-shad*, 3.1.1.

[76]*Shvetashvataropanishad*, 4.6; *Mundakopanishad*, 3.1.1; see also *Maitrepanishad*, III. 1-3.

[77]*Shvetashvataropanishad*, I.2, I.4,5. [78]*Ibid.*, V. 12. [79]*Ibid.*, I. 12,51

tinct, that they form a triad,[80] and that the soul *becomes* one with the Absolute only upon learning the truth about the triad.[81]

Similarly, the *Nrisimha-Tapinyupanishad* in passages that lie close to each other speaks of the Atman as an *unchanging entity,* as an entity that *develops* into something it initially is not, as an *active doer* (e.g., as the one that actively destroys the illusion of duality) as well as one that is just a *passive spectator*! First, here is a passage in which the Atman is depicted as the active agent and one that *becomes* Brahman upon some conditions being fulfilled:

> When the Atman *grows indifferent* to all these (perceptions of the phenomenal world, during sleep or the great Deluge), then, all these get merged in this Atman, alone (like the serpent in the rope); when the Atman *is awakened* (from sleep and the like states), then all these are kindled once again out of this Atman alone. Again it is the Atman that *completely eradicates all these, restrains all these* from recurring, *represses all these,* burns up all these with the fire of the knowledge of its own real nature, and *consumes* all these, till at alone is left as the residuum and then alone *gives itself up to* these knowers of the Atman. Then the Atman, (which has the Brahman alone as its basis), transcending its former state *becomes* the Brahman alone, by *becoming* intensely creative, sustaining and scorching in relation to phenomenal existence, intensely valiant (magnanimous), wherein all phenomenal existence seeks repose, intensely the mightiest among the mightiest, intensely pervading the entire Universe, intensely brilliant, *outshining* every other thing with its self-manifestation, *intensely surveying* all things with its face turned in all the ten directions, intensely of the character of the man-lion, the *Paramapurusha,* Nrisimha, the *Paramatman,* with an intensely terrific aspect towards all unbelievers in the Brahman, with a form at once intensely auspicious and blissful, *dealing instantaneous death* unto the mortal ignorance of the Brahman, intensely venerable to all beings, and of the intense character of '*Aham*' (I), of the character of the transcendent Brahman, and then becomes firmly established in its own glory, for all time, as the Brahman alone. . . .[82]

Next we are told that it is merely a passive witness, one that does not even perceive:

> . . . Really this *maya* is non-existent. The Atman is the transcendent omnipotent Atman alone. This Atman, though it is self-manifest and as such capable of knowing everything apart from itself, everywhere, still as its range of knowledge is transcendent, *it does not actively and directly cognize,* in the form of specific experiences, other phenomena,

[80] *Ibid.,* I. 7, IV. 5. [81] *Ibid.,* I. 9, II. 14.
[82] *Nrisimha-Tapinyupanishad, Uttara-Tapini,* VII. 11-15.

elsewhere, beyond its own self and plays the role of *a mere passive witness*, (even as it does, at the time of the great Deluge and the like).[83]

And then that contrary to what was stated in the first passage quoted above, there is *no question* of its cognizing the truth through any effort, etc., for it already knows all there is to know:

> . . .It is the Atman that is the looker-on of the various functionings of the organs of perception and action, inner and outer, the witness that remains passive and unconcerned, and undergoes no change, *being incapable of change*, either from within or from without, thoroughly established in his own state, devoid of all flaws that may result from the concomitants of ignorance, as he is capable of both introspection and extrospection, and possessed of clear discrimination, as he is established on the other side of the darkness of ignorance and hence *beyond the pale of ignorance*.[84]

Is the Atman subject to illusion? In the standard position, being the Brahman itself, it cannot be subject to illusion. Indeed, illusion in the standard position does not even exist as a state or an entity. But here is the *Shvetashvatara* telling us

> In this which vitalizes all things, which appears in all things, the Great—
> In this Brahma-wheel *the soul flutters about,*
> *Thinking that itself and the Actuator are different.*
> When favoured by Him, it attains immortality.[85]

In one breath we are told that the Atman cannot be deluded,

> . . .Bondage and liberation are the work of *maya*, and do not exist really in one's own Atman, even as, in a piece of rope remaining inactive, there is (at first generated) the optical illusion of a serpent and (then there is) its cessation. From the existence and non-existence of a veil may be said to result bondage and liberation. There is no veiling whatever of the state other than that. The conviction as to the existence and the non-existence of a thing, these two are the properties of the mind and not of that eternal entity (the Atman). Hence, both bondage and liberation are the creatures of *maya* and are not in the Atman. *Where is room for misconception in that digitless, actionless, ever-quiescent, irreproachable, smearless, peerless, transcendent truth, as in the case of ether*? Hence, there is really no such thing as restraint, nor the coming into existence, nor one in the state of bondage, nor the practitioner, nor the seeker after liberation, nor even the liberated one. . . .[86]

83 Ibid., Uttara-Tapini IX. 3.
84 Ibid., Uttara-Tapini, IX. 11.
85 Shvetashvatara Upanishad, I.6.
86 Atmopanishad, 24-32.

that *maya* does not even exist

> As to what is meant by *Maya*. She, that has no beginning, (till the dawning of the knowledge of the Brahman does not take place) and has her end, (when looked at from the point of view of the knowledge acquired from a close study of the *Shastra*-s bearing on the Atman), whose non-existence and existence are respectively based on the testimony of the wise, (who say that she does not exist) and of the ignorant, (who look upon her as real), whose existence is incapable of being proved by ordinary tests, (as from the point of view of the seeker after truth, her existence is highly problematical as of the horn of a hare), who is neither existent, (either from a hypothetical point of view or even as the prime cause of phenomenal existence), nor non existent, (for the reason that her deleterious influence is verily brought to bear on phenomenal existence), nor partly existent and partly non-existent, (very much like light and darkness, which cannot co-exist), who stands out in bold relief (in the eye of the ignorant, who look upon all things, from the gross to the nebulous, as really existing), who, though the prime cause of all fickleness, is herself devoid of all change (ranging between the gross and the nebulous, as her very existence has yet to be proved and would not permit of her being described as apart from the Atman), that is what is known as *maya. Even though she is of a trivial nature and is not existent in the three durations* (the past, present and future), *she is looked upon by the unlettered mass of humanity*, out of sheer ignorance, as real. The notion of her reality is generated only in the minds of worldy-minded. . . .[87]

and in the next that not only does *maya* exist, it is so potent as to delude the Atman—which is *Ishvara* Itself!

> When the Atman, that is the *Ishvara*, (when shrouded with the totality of ignorance) and is the *Jiva*, (when obscured by the subtle ignorance of the inner senses in their individual aspect), regards (out of mistaken identity) the gross body and the like, (which are verily the creatures of fancy and are not related to the Atman) as what belongs to him, that false conception constitutes the bondage of the Atman. The removal of such false conception (about the Atman) constitutes liberation. . . .[88]

> When subjected to the bonds (of misconceptions relating to things apart from himself), even the *Paramatman* thinks that he is the *Jivatman* alone. . . .[89]

> (Both the 'U,' the second *matra* of the *Pranava*, and the Atman) are subject to the delusion of assuming different states and forms that are not their own. . . .[90]

[87] *Sarva-Saropanishad*, 15.
[88] *Ibid.*, 2.
[89] [illegible] VII. 2.
[90] *Skandopanishad*, 6.

The Omniscient Lord possessed of a particle of *maya*, on entering the several bodies and getting deluded by it attained the state of the individual soul. By identification with the three bodies (gross, subtle and causal) he attained the state of the doer and the enjoyer, ever performing the functions of waking, dreaming, sleeping, fainting and dying, he twirls round and round, like a potter's wheel, as if dead though alive, in keeping with the adage relating to the potter's wheel. . . .[91]

He (the reputed *Paramatman* that would not brook the misconception relating to the existence of things apart from Himself), being deluded by *maya* (of the form of ignorance of His own self) all around Him (though in reality He is beyond the pale of the influence of *Maya*), by abiding in the gross and other kinds of body, resorts to all kinds of action due to the influence of false pride that everything everywhere is His own and pertains to Himself. He alone derives the satisfaction incidental to the waking state of enjoyments of various kinds such as women, food, drink and the like while in the dreaming state, He, as the *Jiva*, is even then the enjoyer of pleasure and pain in an artificial world of His own created by His own mind under the influence of *maya* and based on the *vasana* (impressions left on His mind by His experiences during the waking state as if they were real). While during sleep (as long as it lasts) when all the functions of His organs of perception and action, as well as of His mind, stand abated (along with the delusion relating to the existence of things apart from Himself), being overpowered by the darkness of His ignorance, He attains Brahman of the form of bliss. Again, owing to the operation of the influence of the *karma* of His previous incarnations, He reverts to His dreams or is roused to His waking state. . . .[92]

The doer (the *Jiva*) is bound by his *karma*. By renouncing it he attains peace. At the advent of the southern *ayana* or course, turned in the direction of the manifested world of existence, even Sadashiva will become a *Jiva*, due to the misconceptions flowing from Self-consciousness. He also gets deluded by contact with the indiscriminate-natured one. . . .[93]

At one moment we are told that the soul like Brahman is omniscient, that being Brahman it has the same omniscience as Him, in the next that on its onward journey through "flame," etc., it needs to be guided and escorted by "conducting deities," as neither it nor the path it has to travel along are conscious![94] Indeed, the "fact" that these chimerical "conducting deities do exist is "proven" on the ground that, after all, the soul *has* to be guided along the paths; how could it travel if these celestial guides did

[91] *Paingalopanishad*, I. 12.
[92] *Trishikh-brahmanopanishad, the Brahmana*, 15-19.
[93] *Kaivalyopanishad*, 12-15.
[94] *Brahma-Sutra-s*, 4.3. 4-6. Both Shankara and Ramanuja take these *Sutra-s* at face value.

not exist, *ergo* they must be there! The *ignorance* of the *omniscient* souls now becomes the "proof" for asserting that "conducting deities" and "the being who comes to lightning" in fact exist!

Or consider a specific question: What is the size of the Atman?

The basic position is that the Atman is of an inconceivable form and, therefore, quite naturally we cannot say anything about such mundane matters as its size, etc. Yet, we have fairly definite assertions about its size.

We have various accounts that tell us that the Atman is very minute. It is often referred to as the minutest of the minute, subtler than the subtlest ideations of the mind.[95] In a well-known analogy, the sage leads the pupil to think of successively splitting the fig till he reaches "nothing," a dimensionless entity from which yet the great fig tree springs.[96] This is how subtle, he tells the pupil, the Atman is.

Then somewhat more substantial dimensions start coming in as analogies: it is, we are told, of the size of the iron tip of the goading stick,[97] of the part of a hundredth part of a point of hair divided a hundredfold,[98] of a grain of rice, a grain of barley,[99] of the tiniest awn of a grain of wild paddy,[100] that it is tinier than it,[101] that it is subtler than the one-hundred-thousandth part of the awn of a grain of wild paddy or of the tiny edible grain of the *Shyaamaaka* grass or of the fine seed of the banyan tree.[102] Even more elaborate subdivisions are suggested.

> Taking the division into one-hundred-thousand parts as the standard of division, one part obtained by such division of the awn of a grain of wild paddy, denotes the subtle *Jiva-chaitanya*. By further division of that part into one-hundred-thousand parts, one part as obtained denotes the subtler *Ishvara-chaitanya*. By further division of the *Ishvara* part, by adopting one-half of the standard of subdivision, (*i.e.* by dividing such part into fiftty housand parts), one part so obtained denotes the still subtler *Sakshi-chaitanya*. By the loss of the *Sakshin* part in the further attempt at subdivision, what is obtained is the traceless, unmanifested Brahman. . . .[103]

After having gone that far down, we are told many times over that He is the measure of a thumb. . . .[104] that it is "all-pervasive like space,"[105] that the space within the heart in which it resides is of the same magnitude as the space outside.[106]

[95] For instance, *Mundakopanishad*, II. 2.2, II. 1.7; *Maitrepanishad*, II. 5, *Kaivalyopanishad*, 16-23.
[96] *Chandogyopanishad*, VI. 12.
[97] *Shvetashvataropanishad*, 5.8.
[98] *Ibid.*, 5.9.
[99] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, V. 6.
[100] *Atharvasiropanishad*, 63-65.
[101] *Mahopanishad*, V. 54-60.
[102] *Dhyanabindupanishad*, 4.
[103] *Atmopanishad*, 1/4.
[104] For instance, *Shvetashvataropanishad*, III. 13, also 5.11.7, 8; *Maitrepanishad*, VI. 38, *Kathopanishad*, 1.12, 13; IV. 12, 13; VI. 17.
[105] *Taittiriyopanishad*, 2.1.1.
[106] *Chandogyopanishad*, 8.1.3.

At one moment the Upanishads pronounce the souls to be so infinitesimal as to be dimensionless, at the next they are at pains to conjure up "reasons" on account of which a place like the moon or some other part of the celestial world does not get "overcrowded" by the arrival of these (dimensionless) entities from this world!

Well, whatever its size, *where exactly does the Atman reside*? The standard position, repeated scores of times, is that it resides in "the space within the heart."[107] But other assertions are not lacking.

Thus, it is often said to reside above the middle of the eyebrows, at the root of the two nostrils, twelve-digits length from the tip of the nose.[108] Alternatively, that it is at the tip of the nose itself,[109] or, less specifically, that it is in the head,[110] or that it "moves between the left arm and the right hip over the entire region of that portion of the body externally as well as internally, even as the sacrificial thread."[111] On other occasions we are told that the Atman changes its residence as a person moves from one state of consciousness to another: "He has three dwelling places, three conditions of sleep. . . ,"[112] begins the Upanishad. But unfortunately all that records about these dwelling places is, "This is a dwelling place. This is a dwelling place. This is a dwelling place." The field is, therefore, free for the commentators to assert what they will. Thus, as Hume notes, Shankara says that the right eye is the abode during the waking state, the inner mind during the sleeping state and the space within the heart during profound sleep. Shankara himself offered the alternative that the three abodes were "the body of one's father," "the womb of one's mother" and "one's own body." Sayana and Anandagiri took the three abodes to be the right eye, the throat and the heart. . .[113]

Nor do the various descriptions of "*the space within the heart*" tally. The *Chandogya* (VIII.6 6) and *Katha* (VI.16) speak of 101 channels of the heart one of which is said to pass up to the crown of the head, the others departing in various other directions. The *Prashna* (III. 6) is more elaborate: it says that there are these 101 channels, that to each of these belong a hundred smaller channels and that to each of the latter belong 72,000 branching channels. That would make for a total of 101 × 100 × 72,000 or 101 × 100 × 72 channels depending on how one reads the text. The *Subala* (IV. 1) speaks of 10 hollows in the heart. In what is called the "subtle sheath" these are said to branch into 10 branches each of which in turn has 10 branches. And

[107] For instance, *Chandogyopanishad*, 8.1.1, 8.3.3; *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, 4.3.7; *Prashnopanishad*, 3 6.

[108] For instance, *Jabalopanishad*, 2; *Advaya-Tarakopanishad*, 2; *Dhyanabindupanishad*, 38-40; *Brahmavidyopanishad*, 43; *Mandalabrahmanopanishad*, I. II. 4; *Rama-Tapiny Upanishad*, *Uttara-Tapiny*, III. 1-8; *Brahma Sutra-s*, 1.2.32.

[109] *Anna-Purnopanishad*, V. 25-32.

[110] *Trisikhibrahmanopanishad*, the *Mantra*, 9.

[111] *Pashupatabrahmanopanishad*, *Purva-Kanda*, 25.

[112] *Aitareyopanishad*, I. 3.12.

[113] R.E. Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, Oxford, 1975, p. 297, note 4.

out of each of the last are said to branch out the 72,000 channels. The *Brihad-Aranyaka* (II. 1.19) talks only of the 72,000 channels. According to it these channels, each of which is as minute as a hair divided a thousand-fold, is full of white, blue, yellow, green and red (it is not clear whether this refers to colours without substance or a substance of these colours). According to the *Chandogya* (VII. 6.1), the channels arise from the "finest essence which is reddish brown, white, blue, yellow and red." The *Kaushitaki* (IV. 19) maintains that the channels "consist of a minute essence, reddish brown, white, black, yellow and red." According to *Subala* (IV. 1) each of the channels is "filled with fluids of greenish yellow, blue, yellow and white colours. . . ." Clearly, the despatches from the front agree neither about the number of tracks nor about the colours:

The *Dhyanabindupanishad* is even more picturesque in describing this "space within the heart:"

> That is the supreme seat of Vishnu. The lotus of the heart has eight petals and is endowed with thirty-two filaments. In the middle of it is the Sun and in the middle of the Sun is the Moon; in the middle of the Moon is Fire; in the middle of the Fire is lustre; in the middle of the lustre is the seat surrounded with various gems. One should meditate dutifully upon the *Mahavishnu*, who is in the middle of that seat, the god Vasudeva, who is devoid of impurity, who wears the *Srivatsa* (mark) and the *Kaustubha* jewel on his breast, who is ornamented with pearl necklaces, who is clear as the clearest crystal, and resplendent like myriads of moons; or meditate in the following manner. . . .[114]

> There is the lotus of the heart, with the flower down below and the stalk up above, facing downward like the plantain flower, replete with all the *Vedas*, auspicious, enduring for a century, rich with a hundred petals, and graceful like the full-blown lotus flower. . . .[115]

> Now then, I shall presently expound the way of discovering the Atman. In the seat of the heart there is the eight-petalled lotus. In the middle of it, making a circle, there is the form of the *Jivatman*, in the form of radiance of the size of a speck. Therein is established all. That knows all; That does all; all is the performance of This. . . .[116]

Let us move on to another question: *What is the status of the empirical world?*

The dominant position, as we have noted on more than one occasion, is that nothing apart from Brahman exists and as He is an undifferentiated, pure consciousness, the empirical world—the world of wood and stone—does not exist. This position is, as we have seen, reiterated scores and scores of times. Yet, if one goes by isolated passages, one can sustain any one of

the following positions: that it does not exist; that it is a figment of our mind (in which case while the world does not exist the mind, which generates the figment, *does* exist); that it is a figment of *His* imagination (it is not, of course, clear whether the "figments" of His imagination become real or not); that it exists, it exists as wood and stone, that is, as we conventionally perceive it; that it is identical with Brahman; that it is apart from Him and as such that it, alternatively, abides *in* Him or is propped *by* Him or is, along with sentient souls, His body; that it is always *in* Him or, alternatively, that it is absorbed in Him at the end of the *yuga*. . . .

One can start the narration at any of several points. Let us begin by recalling the direct affirmations. "All is absolute Brahman," says the *Tejobindupanishad*. "There is no scriptural text, nor the word, nor the *Veda*, nor the letter . . ."[117]; " . . .Brahman, indeed, is this whole world, this widest extent," says the *Mundaka* Upanishad[118]; "all this is but the Self," say the *Chandogya* and other Upanishads again and again.[119] But in the next breath they talk of Brahman creating, sustaining and devouring this varied Universe,

> O Ganapati . . . . This phenomenal world in its entirety originates from Thee alone of the character of the four-faced Brahma at the end of every *Pralaya*. This phenomenal world in its entirety derives its sustenance from Thee alone of the character of the all-pervasive Vishnu. This phenomenal world in its entirety will attain its dissolution with form in Thee alone of the character of Rudra . . . .[120]

of His desiring to be many, of His "desire to quintuplicate the elements," of His "desire to disquintuplicate the quintuplicated elements." All these passages testifying to His desire to be many, of His creating, destroying, etc., the worlds would be totally redundant if there were no worlds at all. The Upanishads talk again and again of Brahman being a dam that keeps the worlds from getting mixed up.

> Then again that which is the Self is a dam, a reservoir (an impounder) to prevent worlds from getting mixed up . . . .[121]

> It is the Lord of all, It is the Ruler of all beings, It is the dam that serves as the boundary to keep the different worlds apart . . . .[132]

How would the question of keeping the worlds apart arise if the worlds do not even exist? How would the question of His being "the Ruler of all beings arise," if the beings do not even exist? If there are no beings why would

[117] *Tejobindupanishad*, 6.3.
[118] *Mundakopanishad*, 2.2.11.
[119] For instance, *Chandogyopanishad*, 7.25.2, 3.14.1, *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, 2.4.6; etc.
[120] *Ganapatyupanishad*, 5.
[121] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, 4.4.22.
[122] *Chandogyopanishad*, 8.4.1.

Krishna say, "*the diverse characteristics* of creatures originate from Me alone . . .?[123] If there are no beings, no worlds what sense would it make for Krishna to say, "Whatever being is glorious, prosperous or strong, that know thou to be a manifestation of My splendour . . . . I stand sustaining this whole world by one part (of Myself)"?[124] Would He be called "the master of the *pradhana* (primordial nature) and of the individual souls,"[125] if there were no nature at all? Do the Upanishads not speak repeatedly of the earth being the body of Brahman?[126] If there are no beings at all what would the sense be in Brahman saying, "Let Me, entering those beings with this living Self, evolve names and forms,"[127] or in affirming, "All these creatures have their root in tue *Sat*, they dwell in the *Sat*, they rest in the *Sat*,"[128] or in affirming, "He who entered within is the Ruler of all beings, the Self of all,"[129] or in affirming, "as from a blazing fire sparks fly forth a thousandfold, thus are various beings brought forth from the Imperishable, and return thither also,"[130] or of referring to Brahman as the source "from whence these beings are produced"?[131]

But the same Upanishads, a Shankara would say, also affirm the following three propositions which, taken together, negate the world of name and form: first, that in the beginning there was the Being alone who is neither existence nor non-existence nor both, that is, there was Brahman alone; second, that this Brahman was (and, of course, is) nothing but pure, undifferentiated consciousness; third, that the effect is no different from the cause. Accordingly, the world, etc., whose creation is spoken of by the Upanishads can in reality be nothing other than the pure, undifferentiated consciousness by which and from which they were created. That is why the *Chandogya* speaks of creation being chimerical—"the effect is a name merely," it says, "which has its origin in speech; the truth is that (the thing made of clay) is clay merely . . . ."[132]

This is the view that the *Brahma-Sutra*-s set out to summarize: "There is non-difference of the cause and effect on account of the texts about origin, etc.," they say, and because "the effect is perceived when the cause is there," because "the posterior one (the effect) has (earlier) existence (in the cause)," they are non-different from each other "on the analogy of a piece of cloth."[133] Each of these "reasons" can be upheld on the basis of passages from the Upanishads.[134] And yet none of them stands up to even a moment's examination. Take the ground furnished by *Sutra* 2.1.15, namely that the cause and effect are identical because the latter "is

[123] *Bhagvad Gita*, 10.4.
[124] *Ibid.*, 10.41, 42.
[125] *Shvetashvataropanishad*, 6.16.
[126] For instance, *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, 3.7.3-23, *Subalopanishad*, 7.1.
[127] *Chandogyopanishad*, 6.3.2.
[128] *Ibid.*, 6.8.4.
[129] *Taittiriya-Aranyaka*, 3.24.
[130] *Mundakopanishad*, 2.1.1.
[131] *Taittiriyopanishad*, 3.1.1.
[132] *Chandogyopanishad*, 6.1.4.
[133] *Brahma-Sutra-s*, 2.1.14-19.
[134] See, for instance, Shankara's enthusiastic comments on these *Sutra-s* cf. *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya*, *op. cit.*, pp. 326-346.

consists of the three qualities, and the enjoyer is the person who stands in the midst. Here observation is clearly proof. Since animals spring from a source, therefore what is to be enjoyed is the source. Thereby is explained the fact that *Matter is what is to be enjoyed.* Therefore, the person is an enjoyer, and Nature is what is to be enjoyed. Being therein, he enjoys. . . .[142]

The sun, verily, is life; matter, indeed, is the moon.
Matter, verily, is everything here, both what is formed and what is formless. Therefore material form (*murti*) indeed is matter. . . .[143]

THE NEED FOR CONTRARY ASSERTIONS

The number of passages in which the Upanishads affirm contrary positions can be mutiplied many times over. But the few examples that have been given will probably suffice to suggest that there is, indeed, a good bit that has to be explained, to be reconciled.

The basic reasons on account of which these contrary assertions came to be incorporated in the corpus, on account of which they have persisted over the centuries, these reasons have already been hinted at at the beginning of the chapter—the historical fact that the Upanishads, etc., represent accretions over centuries, the fact that as the concepts were empty boxes, as they were non-verifiable, anyone could assert what he willed about them and so on.

We should now note an additional—purely functional—reason. Contrary propositions were affirmed and retained because contrary propositions were needed. I shall illustrate the matter by extending an example that was taken up in the last chapter—that of creativity and responsibility. The reader will recall that for legitimizing the existing order the tradition needs to anchor in the people's minds a complex of notions—the notion that the Lord is Himself the author of all that happens, in particular, of the prevailing ensemble of social relations; the notion that all that happens, in particular, the ensemble of social relations that comes to prevail, has a rationale to it, that it is just, thus the well-off are well-off only because of their virtuous deeds and the badly-off are badly off only because of their evil deeds. Man has to be dwarfed so that he does not become audacious enough to think of changing the existing order, at the same time he has to be made to feel responsible for his own wretched state so that, saturated in guilt, he will begin to see justice in the circumstances in which he happens to have been placed. A moment's reflection will show that these are not harmonious notions, that contrary propositions are needed to buttress and sustain them. And this is one reason why contrary assertions find a place in the corpus. To dwarf man, to convince him that he is puny in the face of the order of things, we have to create and magnify a Lord, we have to maintain that *He*

[142]*Ibid.*, 6.10.

is the only creative agent, that *He* alone is the author of everything. But to fill the dwarfed man with guilt we have to assert that the Lord dispenses fruit exclusively in accordance with our efforts. In this way alone will we internalize the twin notions so necessary to the social order—namely, the notions that creativity is all His but responsibility is all ours.

The resulting convolutions can be illustrated in many ways. Consider a few of the *Brahma-Sutra*-s in sequence.

While the Upanishads repeatedly affirm that everything happens solely because of His will that it happen, the aphorist quickly perceives the difficulty, "for the Lord there can be no creatorship," he says, "for that leads to incongruity."[154] What is the "incongruity"? As Shankara explains, "a Lord who creates the various creatures by dividing them into grades of inferiority, mediocrity and superiority will be open like ourselves to the charge of likes and dislikes, etc., so that He would cease to be God . . . .[145] All right, that means that the individual soul is the creative agent, does it not? Yes, yes, says the aphorist. And he gives several reasons to buttress this view: "thus alone do the scriptures become meaningful," he says,[146] after all if the individual is not a free agent then there can be no meaning to the do's and don'ts of the scriptures; moreover, he adds, the scriptures themselves speak of the self's volitional acts;[147] does the *Brihad-Aranyaka Upanishad* not speak of his "going wherever he likes,"[148] of his moving about "as he pleases in the body,"[149] of his gathering up the organs and senses,[150] does the *Prashna Upanishad* not speak of him as "the seer, feeler, hearer, thinker, ascertainer, doer . . . ."[151]

But having gone this far, the aphorist perceives the *other* difficulty—if you exalt the individual self like this, will you not be crowding out the Absolute, the Inner Controller? So, no sooner has he endowed the self with creativity than the aphorist starts retracing his steps. Creativity, he now says, is not an essential attribute of the self, it is merely an adventitious attribute—not like heat is to fire but "like the carpenter existing under both conditions,"[152] that is like a carpenter who has tools at one point and does not have them at another. Having reduced the soul's creativity to an occasional, adventitious attribute, he next snatches even this away, ". . .the agentship (of the individual soul)," he now says, "is derived from God for that is what is stated in the *Vedas*."[153]

But this now lands God into the old difficulty—if *He* is the sole creative agent then *He* has also to bear the responsibility for all that happens. The very next *Sutra*, therefore, goes back to the *status quo ante* of the *Sutra* we opened with: "(God is) however dependent on the efforts made, so that the injunctions and prohibitions may not become meaningless and other defects

[144] *Brahma-Sutra-s*, 2.2.37.
[145] *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya*, *op. cit.*, p. 434.
[146] *Brahma-Sutras*, 2.3.33.
[147] *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, 4.3.12.
[148] *Ibid.*, 2.1.17, 18.
[149] *Brahma-Sutra-s*, 2.3.40.
[150] *Ibid.*, 2.3.34, 35, 36.
[151] *Ibid.*, 2.1.18.
[152] *Prashnopanishad*, 4.9.
[153] *Ibid.*, 2.3.41.

perceived" in the former. This is adequate for Shankara: "in a cloth constituted by the arrangement of yarns," he says, explaining the *Sutra*, "one does not perceive the cloth apart from the yarns . . . the yarns themselves, arranged as warps and woofs, are perceived independently. . . ."[135] This is just another example of the habit of spouting an analogy without thinking through its implications. After all, is the effect, the cloth in this case, perceived when the causes (the yarn, the loom, etc.) are there but have not been worked upon and arranged to form it? Moreover, even if it is *perceived* when merely the causes are present, is it *no different* in characteristics, the functions it can perform, etc., from its causes, the yarn, loom, etc? Did Shankara ever try warding off the cold by draping a loom around him instead of cloth; or did he try weaving cloth by using cloth instead of the loom? Or take *Sutra* 2.1.16—the effect is the same as the cause, it says, as it already exists in the cause. "A thing which does not exist in identity with something," declares Shankara, "does not originate from that as, for instance, oil from sand . . . ."[136] The cause, he explains, carries in itself a "special potency" in it for producing the effect, that is why curds originate from milk alone and not from clay and why a pot originates from clay and not from milk. And as the effect as much as the cause is nothing but this particular "special potency"—in that it is this special potency which distinguishes it from other causes and effects—the two are non-different. But surely, Sri Shankaracharya, whatever be the merit of this "special potency," you cannot deny that the effect *has* a few additional attributes and capabilities that the cause did not have, can you? "A thing," declares the *Acharya* loftily, "does not become different just because of the appearance of some peculiarity; for Devdatta, even though noticed in different attitudes when he has his hands and feet contracted or extended, does not differ in his personality, since the recognition of identity persists as (when we remark), 'It is he himself' . . . ."[137] Again a question is being evaded with an imperfect similie. It would be just as accurate to say, along with the Buddhists that the Devdatta who sat cross-legged a moment ago and the Devdatta who is standing now is *not* the same because his cells have aged in the meanwhile.

How would a Ramanuja react to these assertions of Shankara? The effect *is* different, he insists with equal vigour, for the attributes which accrue to it are *essential* and not *adventitious* . . . . But why go so far as to invoke Ramanuja? We have only to stick with the *Brahma-Sutra*-s and with Shankara himself to witness a sleight-of-mouth. After all, going by the Upanishads alone, how can one talk of the effect existing in the cause before creation? For do the Upanishads not say that in the beginning *all* was non-existent, that Brahman—the pure consciousness—existed alone and undifferentiated, without a second? In the face of all this, how can the *Sutrakara* or Shankara maintain that the subsequent effects did, in fact, exist in Brahman at that time? Their existence would have implied differentiation,

[135]*Ibid.*, p. 336.

[136]*Ibid.*, p. 337.

[137]*Ibid.*, [illegible]

would it not? O, says the embarrassed *Sutrakara*, the word "non-existent" is used in these passages merely "from the standpoint of a difference of characteristics."[138] But even if that were true, it would at least mean that the characteristics of the effect and cause *are different*, would it not? The *Sutrakara* fumbles and mumbles along. Not so Shankara, he is defiant. He first tries the convoluted pronouncement, "this declaration of the non-existence of the effect before creation is *not* meant to imply absolute non existence . . . . The condition in which name and form become evolved is different from the condition in which name and form are not evolved. Hence although the effect *exists* as non-different from the cause before creation, still from the standpoint of this difference in conditions the effect is *declared to be non-existent* before creation."[139] But this is patently inadequate—for here Shankara is conceding that the difference between two states, one in which we have name and form and one in which we do not have them, to be real. This goes against his customarily absolutist posture. Hence, in the next breath, the word "non-existent" *itself* is declared to be a misnomer, a carryover from our habits of day-to day speech: "*since in the world* a thing is said to exist when it manifests itself through name and form, therefore, *as a concession to common sense*, the universe is said to be non-existent before being evolved through name and form."[140] Notice that the one who is here bending backward to assert that the effect exists not just now but even before creation is the same Shankara who on most occasions is found bending as far backwards to assert that the effect—the world as we know and experience it—does not exist in any case!

What else can a poor Shankara do when in one breath the Upanishads speak of the world as "*just a mass of thought*"

> Incomprehensible is that supreme Soul (Atman), unlimited, unborn, not to be reasoned about, unthinkable—He whose soul is space (*akasatman*)! In the dissolution of the world He alone remains awake. From that space He, assuredly, awakes this world, *which is a mass of thought*. It is thought by Him, and in Him it disappears.[141]

and in another assert that "*matter is what is to be enjoyed* . . .," "*matter, verily, is everything here*. . . ."

> Now, there is something else to be known. There is a higher development of this Atman-sacrifice, namely as concerns food and the eater. The further explanation of this (is as follows).
>
> The conscious person stands in the midst of Matter. He is an enjoyer, for he enjoys the food of Nature. Even this elemental soul (*bhutatman*) is food for him; its maker is Matter. Therefore, that which is to be enjoyed

[138] *Brahma-Sutra-s*, 2.1.17.
[139] *Brahma-Sutra-*[illegible] *op. cit.*, p. 338.

may not arise"![154] And, therefore, as an earlier *Sutra* says, we cannot charge Him with being inequitous or cruel: He dispenses with regard to our acts.[155]

This sequence of two steps forward and two steps back is repeated again and again. Thus in the *Gita*, Krishna says that He Himself creates the castes and places individuals in one or the other caste, this notion being necessary to endow caste-hierarchies with a higher sanction. But, He soon adds that He does so in accordance with a person's innate *guna*-s and that these *guna*-s accrue from the person's own deeds, this notion being necessary to absolve Him of responsibility. However, as this would make individuals their own masters, He again proclaims Himself to be the Lord of Beings, the Inner Controller and thus snatches volition, direction, initiative back to Himself.

PAPERING OVER THE CONTRADICTIONS

Needed or not needed, the contrary assertions must have struck many a teacher, many a pupil in the face. How did the tradition fortify itself against the questioning, against scepticism? How did each disputant maintain his particular portion in the face of assertions to the contrary in the texts themselves?

The first device is the simplest: ignore the contrary assertions. It is almost impossible to give the reader an idea of the facility with which a Shankara or a Ramanuja, while using one formulation to butress his position, blatantly ignores other formulations, formulations so numerous and so explicit that they come to the mind even of a novice. There is no substitute for going through their *bhashya*-s directly.

The second device is one that we have already seen at work in the preceding chapter—of stuffing such meaning into an expression as serves one's own position.

The third device is grit-and-obfuscation, to proceed as if nothing had happened, as if the texts were unanimous as well as unambiguous, and in the meantime to give your listener the slip by some obfuscatory passage. We will have to content ourselves with just one or two examples.

As we noticed a short while ago there are many passages in the Upanishads which go against the standard position that there is only one Atman-which-is-Brahman. The *Kaushitaki Upanishad*, to cite just one instance, tells us that "as the head (of a guild) lives on (what is brought by) his own people or retinue, or as his own people or retinue live on him, so also this conscious soul (*i.e.*, the individual) lives on these souls (of the sun, etc.) and these souls live on this soul." Now, clearly the Upanishad is here telling us, first, that there isn't just one soul but that there are many and, second, it is telling us something about the type of relationship that they have to each other, namely, a relationship of interdependence. There are many texts which affirm the plurality of souls, which speak of some souls

[154] *Ibid.*, 2.3.42.

[155] *Ibid.*

being embodied and unenlightened, of others attaining release. Now, what is the non-dualist Shankara to make of such passages? Here is a typical comment of his on such passages in which we see the third device—grit-with-obfuscation—clearly at work:

> . . .as in the world, (we find him saying), there may perchance be a she-goat, red, white and black in colour, with kids, many in number and of similar constitution as hers, and some he-goat may lie by her, while some other may discard her after enjoyment, similarly this source of all elements (*i.e., maya*) consisting of fire, water and food, and having three colours gives birth to many products that are similar to her. She is enjoyed by the unenlightened knower of the body (*i.e*, the individual soul) and discarded by the enlightened one. (Up to this point Shankara seems to be clearly conceding that the souls are different; now comes the obfuscation.) But it is not to be assumed, (he continues), that since one soul lies by her, while another discards, therefore, there emerges a real difference among the souls as is upheld by the others (*Samkhya-s*). For this is not an attempt at establishing any difference among the souls; rather this is an attempt at explaining the mechanism of bondage and freedom. This process of bondage and freedom is explained by taking the help of common-sense difference (among souls). This difference, however, is a creation of limiting adjuncts; and is conjured up by false ignorance. It is not real. . . .[156]

We start with two different he-goats; next we come to two distinct types of souls, those that are embroiled in *maya* and those that are not; no sooner have we been instructed about the difference between them that we are told, "O, but the difference is not established because the topic was something else"; then that the difference originates in limiting adjuncts; and, finally, that as the limiting adjuncts are fignments of ignorance, the difference, (which wasn't even the topic under discussion, remember?) is unreal. But, pray, *whose* ignorance has enabled you to talk away the differences among souls that the texts so clearly speak about? You have yourself said that there aren't any distinct beings. So we cannot anchor ignorance in them. And as Brahman in any case is pure intelligence it can't be anchored in Him. . . .But that is another story.

Or take Ramanuja. Several texts speak of *prana* as being minute; as, for instance, when they tell us that the *prana* follows after the soul upon the latter leaving the body. But then there are other texts in which *prana* is said to be coextensive with the three worlds, with the Universe, to be so extensive as to be the foundation of everything. Now, watch how Ramanuja talks away the discrepancy: "But as the texts declaring the passing out and so on," he says, "of the *prana prove it to be* of limited size, the all-embracingness ascribed to *prana* in those other texts must be interpreted to mean only that the

[156] *Brahma-Sutra-Bhashya of Shankaracharya, op. cit.*, pp. 262-263.

life of all living and breathing creatures depends on breath."[157] Notice the obfuscatory sleight-of-words: the texts that refer to *prana* as being minute are held to *prove* that it is minute and the other texts are held to suggest something they do not state!

The fourth device is to go along with the flips as well as with the flops of the texts, to affirm with enthusiasm one proposition when the texts affirm it and to affirm with equal enthusiasm its opposite when the texts affirm that. (I have already listed some examples of these somersaults in the preceding chapter. The reader in search of a handy illustration should look up the commentaries of Shankara and Ramanuja on *Brahma-Sutra*-s, 2.1.34, 2.2.32-42, that were alluded to a short while ago.) This practice of cheering each of two contradictory passages successively is not just a matter of convenience but of principle. The tradition *requires* that we *simultaneously* believe in the contrary assertions of the texts. As Manu says, "...when two sacred texts (*Shruti*) are in conflict, *both* are held to be law, for *both* are pronounced by the wise (to be) valid law."[158] Double-think is our Brahman-given-right and we shall have it!

The fifth device is to use one set of arguments or passages at one moment and to forget them at the next. (This is different from the first device which involves shutting one's eyes to some passages and arguments at all times!) A single quaint instance from Shankara will illustrate what I have in mind. Now, as is well known, the Jain view of the soul is that it permeates the entire body. Both the *Sutrakara* and Shankara reject this conception and give the following grounds for doing so: the scriptures declare the soul to be immutable, to be changeless, but the Jain conception would require the soul to grow as a boy becomes an adult, to shrink as he loses weight from old age or sickness; it would require the soul's size to differ from individual to individual, for the soul to change its size as one who is a man in this life becomes an elephant in the next.[159] But then the Upanishads themselves (and following them the *Brahma-Sutra*-s 1.3.24, 25) assert that the soul is the size of a thumb. Well, should we not reject this conception on precisely the same grounds on which we rejected the Jain view? For thumbs grow as a child becomes a man, they vary from individual to individual and, then, what of fish or the amoeba that have no thumbs, what is the measure of their souls? The *Brahma-Sutra*-s shut their eyes to the first two questions. The third they evade (in *Sutra*, 1.3.25) on the ground that the pronouncement that the soul is of the size of the thumb applies to humans only, the scriptures "being concerned with human beings" alone. (This is a lame explanation, to say the least, for elsewhere we are told again and again that the subject-matter of the scriptures is all of creation and that they are universally as well as perennially valid.) Shankara braves the second question only to end up implying that while

[157] *Vedanta-Sutras with Ramanuja's Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 575.
[158] *The Laws of Manu*, 2.14.
[159] *Brahma-Sutra*-s, 2.2.34-6; and *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya, op. cit.*, pp. 430-433.

the soul is immutable its size *does* vary between, say, Gods and men! The question comes up in the discussion about gods: can we say even in their case that the soul is the size of a thumb? Yes, says Shankara (following *Brahma-Sutra* 1.3.26), "even in the case of gods the Upanishadic text about the soul being the size of a thumb is not improper when *their own thumbs* are kept in view"![160] I suppose someone has measured the size of the thumbs of gods and can certify that keeping these thumbs in view we can still say that souls are the sizes of thumbs! Poor Shankara's troubles are by no means at an end. For there are Upanishadic texts that themselves state the Jain view: the *Chandogya* speaks of the soul pervading the entire body and, indeed, being exactly like it,[161] the *Brihad-Aranyaka* speaks of Brahman entering the body "even to the tips of the finger-nails,"[162] the *Kaushitaki* repeats this view and again affirms that "this intelligential self has enteredt his bodily self up to the hair and the finger-nail tips. . . ."[163] Shankara shuts his eyes to these passages. In any case, as we would expect from our discussion in the preceding chapter, Shankara doesn't stick on the thumb-position either. He is soon back to his standard view that actually the soul is formless and dimensionless[164] and tries to explain away the numerous passages in the Upanishads about the soul being the size of the thumb or of being atomic, etc., on the specious plea that actually the passages he was so recently discussing so earnestly do not refer to the soul at all but to the soul-conceived-as-intellect or the soul-as-dominated-by-modes of intellect![165]

The sixth device is to insist that, in spite of their conventional meanings, deep down, different words actually mean the same thing. Once again, our old friend Brahman provides an ample illustration.

"Space is Brahman," says *Brahma-Sutra*, 1.1.22, "for Brahman's indicatory mark is in evidence." The reference here is to several passages in the Upanishads in which we are told, for instance, "Brahman has Space as its body,"[166] "Space is the Self,"[167] "for all things originate from Space to be sure. . .for space certainly is greater than these and Space is their ultimate goal. . .,"[168] "this *Udgitha* is this Space and is greater and higher than all that is high. This one that is such is infinite,"[169] "Space indeed is the accomplisher (the revealer) of name and form,"[170] "*Om Kam* (bliss) is Brahman, *Kham* (Space) is Brahman."[171] So that by the end the word "Space"[172] no longer refers to empirical space; it is drained of its customary meaning and becomes an empty word into which one can now stuff the same features, the same powers as have been attributed to another word,

"Brahman." This much having been accomplished we can now be told that there is no contradiction involved in saying at one place, "Space is the evolver of names and forms," and at another, "Brahman is the evolver of names and forms," on the ground that in actual fact the two words mean the same thing. But they mean the same thing only because you have drained both and put the same "meaning" into each of them.

When someone has made *two* words mean the same thing, we can be certain someone else will come along and make *three* words mean the same thing. "On that very ground (the ground of the same indicatory marks being present)," says *Brahma-Sutra*, 1.1.23, "*Prana* (is Brahman)." Here, as Shankara argues, the allusion is to passages such as, "all the things proceed towards and merge in *Prana* and from It they emerge,"[173] "when a man is in deep sleep, then speech enters into *Prana*, the ear enters into *Prana*, the mind enters into *Prana*. When he wakes up again they re-emerge from *Prana* itself,"[174] "when a sleeping man has no dream whatsoever and he becomes one with this *Prana*, then into that *Prana* enters speech together with all the names. . . .As for the *Prana*—verily, that is the intelligential self, as for the intelligential self—verily that is the *Prana*. . .,"[175] "I (*i.e.*, Indra) am *Prana*, identified with consciousness. You meditate on Me, who am of such stature, as life and immortality,"[176] "And this (the set of ten existential elements) is not a diversity. But as of a chariot the felly is fixed on the spokes and the spokes are fixed on the hub, even so these elements of being are fixed on the elements of intelligence, and the elements of intelligence are fixed on the *Prana*. This same *Prana*, in truth, is the intelligential self, (it is) bliss, ageless, immortal."[177]

Thus, first the word "Space" became Brahman, now the word "*Prana*" has become Brahman. It is but natural, therefore, that all the three should now be interchangeable: "*Prana* is Brahman, Bliss is Brahman, Space is Brahman."[178]

But notice what is being done here. In what sense is *Prana* (or "Space," for that matter) Brahman? In the sense, as the *Brahma-Sutra*-s put it, that it bears in some passages the indicatory marks which in other passages are said to belong to Brahman alone. Thus the word "*Prana*" is the word Brahman in the sense and to the extent that the same meaning has been stuffed into both the words. And this tautology is retailed to self-hypnotized devotees as revelation!

Nor is this habit of insisting that different words mean the same thing confined to esoterics like "Brahman." As Brahman is one, as reality is undifferentiated, even in conventional discourse the true import of words which seem contradictory must really be the same. Where then is the question of passages *contradicting* one another? It is true that parts of the texts (*e.g.*, the *Gita* II or IV) urge that we renounce fruit while others (*e.g.*, the *Gita*

[173] *Chandogyopanishad*, 1.11.5.
[174] *Shatapatha Brahmana*, 10.3.3.6.
[175] *Kaushitakeupanishad*, 3.3.
[176] *Ibid.*, 3.2.
[177] *Ibid.*, 3.8.
[178] *Chandogyopanishad*, 4.10.4.

IV.33.36-38, XIII.23) emphasize knowledge, but where is the *contradiction? True* renunciation of fruit will automatically lead to, it will coincide with *true* knowledge. And, pray, how will we know that our renunciation of fruit is *true*, that it is *complete*? Precisely when it leads to *true* knowledge! Conversely, *true* knowledge itself will lead us to renounce fruit. There is no difference then.

Once we are on this road where one concept *implies* the other, all the conventional virtues that are urged can also be deduced one from the other. Renunciation of fruit *implies* Truth, it *implies Ahimsa*, Truth *implies* fearlessness, recognizing Him in each *implies* love and so on.[179] The *Chandogya* records a typical conversation between a pupil and his teacher. The pupil has served the teacher well for 12 years and now, the teacher, the great Satyakama Jabala, and his wife decide to teach him the secret doctrine: "Brahman is life," they tell him, "Brahman is joy. Brahman is the void." Three concepts are involved here—life, joy, void—and the pupil is a bit puzzled: "I understand that Brahman is life," he says, "but joy and void I do not understand." How do the teachers respond? "Joy, verily," they tell him, "that is *the same as* the void. The void, verily, that is *the same as* Joy."[180] What could be simpler?

If you fail to see how Truth necessarily *implies Ahimsa*, love and renunciation of fruit, how joy *implies* void and *vice-versa*, how both *imply* and are *implied* by life, then obviously you have not penetrated "deep enough" into the matter. And when would you have penetrated "deep enough"? Why, when you at once see that each is implied by the other!

But let us get back to Brahman. We had seen that in the short distance of two *Sutra*-s He had already been equated with space (or ether) and *Prana*. But no sooner have we advanced two steps we must retreat two steps. For if "Brahman *is* Space," why are we also told, "From that self, which is such, *originated* space. . . .From that self, which is such, was *born* space, from space air, from air fire. . . ."[181] Why does the *Chandogya* say, "Having *created* space and air, That *created* fire."[182] For if Space *is* Brahman where is the question of Brahman *creating* it?

O, Shankara would explain, thus illustrating the seventh device that is used to paper over inconsistencies, O that's because when the Upanishads say, "Space *is* Brahman" or when they say, as in the *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad* (2.3.37) that it is "immortal," they are using the words "is" and "immortality" only in a secondary sense. They don't *really* mean that Space is Brahman, or that it is immortal. They are just using conventional figures of speech to illustrate the incredible vastness of Brahman.[183]

[179] For typical deductions of this sort see, *The Gita According to Gandhi*, Mahadeva Desai (ed.), Navjivan, Ahmedabad, 1956 pp. 132, 133, 237, 348.

[180] *Chandogyopanishad*, IV. 10.4.

[181] *Taittiriyopanishad*, 2.1.1.2.

[182] *Chandogyopanishad*, 6.2.3.

[183] *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya*, p. 455. The dodges are not, of course, identical. Ramanuja takes the word "is" in the primary sense but [illegible] "subtle" and "gross" states of each entity.

Even this sleight-of-words does not get over all the difficulties. We have sought to dilute the impact of "Space *is* Brahman" by taking shelter in passages that state "Brahman *created* Space. . . ." Now, references to *creation* create problems of their own. They imply, do they not, that something *separate* from Brahman has been created? For, as the *Brahma-Sutra*, 2.3.7, notes, "separateness persists wherever there is an effect, as is seen in the world. . . ." Thus the *Sutrakara* and with him the later commentators have to dilate not just the word "is" but also the word "creation!" The Upanishadic passage about the creation of space, says the aphorist now, "has a secondary sense for real creation is impossible,"[184] The real position is that nothing different from Brahman has ever been created; you see, argues the *Sutrakara* in *Sutra* 2.3.6., "the (Vedic) assertion (that 'all things become known when the one is known') can remain unaffected only if all the effects are non-different from Brahman . . . ." (I shall leave it to the reader to guess how Shankara and Ramanuja make contrary use of a *Sutra* such as this.)

As another instance consider the way Shankaracharya handles two of the *Brahma-Sutra*-s that deal with the origin of the Universe from Brahman (for instance, *Sutra*-s 1.4.14, 15). He is confronted with several Upanishadic passages that give varying accounts of what existed before Brahman created any thing and of the sequence in which different entities were created. Thus, for instance, the *Taittiriya Upanishad* (2.7) recalls, "In the beginning, all this was but *non-existence*. From that sprang existence . . . ."; the *Chandogya* (3.19.11) also states, "This was but *non-existence* in the beginning. That became ready to be manifest . . . ." But at another point the *Chandogyupanishad* (6.2.1,2) itself repudiates this assertion: ". . . some say that the universe was non-existent before creation. But how can this be, O amiable one? How can existence emerge out of non-existence? This was but *existence* to be sure in the beginning." Similarly, while the *Taittiriya* (2.1.) states that the first to emerge from Brahman was "space," the *Chandogya* (6.2.3) states that it was the vital *prana*. And so on. Now how does a Shankara get around these passages?

Simple. First, he tries evasion. Why do you let these discrepancies in the order of creation bother you, he asks? After all, the basic question is, "from whom did the Universe originate?" and on that all the texts agree that it is Brahman who is the origin. The question of the order in which the entities came into being is not important, for the Upanishads do not promise

There is no contradiction, he says, between Space (in his rendering, ether) '*being* Brahman and also being *created by* Brahman for "all elementary substances such as ether, air and so on have two different states, a gross material one and a subtle one. The ether in its subtle state is the universal cause; in its gross state it is an effect of the primal cause; in its gross state it thus springs from itself, that is from ether in the subtle state. . . ." *Vedanta-Sutras, with Ramanuja's Commentary*, G. Thibaut (tr.), *Sacred Books of the East*, Max Mueller (ed.), Vol. 38, Motilal Banarsidas, 1971, reprint, p. 244.

[184] *Brahma-Sutra*-s, 2.3.3.

any boons—in this world or the next—from knowing the correct order. Second, he says, we should not let the reference to "non-existence" being in the beginning bother us because, and this is what is relevant to the device we are illustrating at the moment, in all these passages the expression "non-existence" is being used only in a "secondary sense"![185]

This see-saw continues indefinitely for there are no rules to determine when a word or a stanza is to be taken in its primary, literal sense and when in a secondary, figurative sense, when it is to be taken as proclaiming a fact and when as merely illustrating a matter by employing a conventional figure of speech. As the *Sutrakara* himself says, "and it is possible for the same word (for instance, "creation," "is", etc.) to have (primary as well as secondary senses) like the word Brahman."[186]

Thus, as if to illustrate this general position, he himself insists later on that the words "birth" and "death" in the Upanishads are to be taken in the primary sense if the reference is to the mind but in the secondary sense if the reference is to the soul![187] Provided we stick to this rule we will notice that the Upanishads are always consistent, that they always affirm the mind to be mortal and the soul to be immortal! But we will reach this conclusion only if we always stick to the rule!

The eighth device of papering over the contradictions is exclamation. Just that. How wonderful it is, the enthusiasts exclaim that the anomalies exist, that the inconsistencies and contradictions exist. What greater proof could there be of His powers than that He *can* contain contraries within Himself? Here are three verses (5.14,15 and 29) from the fifth discourse of the *Gita:*

> The Lord creates neither agency nor action for the world; neither does He connect action with its fruit. It is nature that is at work. . . .

> The Lord does not take upon Himself anyone's vice or virtue; it is ignorance that veils knowledge and deludes all creatures. . . .

> Knowing Me as the Acceptor of sacrifice and austerity, the great Lord of all the worlds, the Friend of all creation, the *yogi* attains to peace. . . .

The reader notices a slight discrepancy—in the first two Krishna declares that He is *not* the agent or the referee and in the third that He *is* the agent, referee and Lord. And here is the characteristic way in which a devotee "reconciles" the passages:

strives to have a glimpse of Him and in so doing invests Him with diverse and even contradictory attributes. . . .[188]

Thus, there is no contradiction really. It is just that in our meagre vocabulary we are unable to state contraries to be simultaneously true. If you persist in asking "but how can He contain contraries?" the savants are sure to respond with much triumph, "*that* precisely is the mystery, *that* precisely is His greatness." Here are verses 4 and 5 from the ninth discourse of the *Gita*:

> By Me, unmanifest in form, this whole world is pervaded; all beings are in Me, I am not in them . . . . And yet those beings are not in Me. That indeed is My unique power as Lord! Sustainer of all beings, I am not in them; My Self brings them into existence. . . .

and here is Gandhi's "explanation" of them:

> *The sovereign power of God lies in this mystery, this miracle*, that all beings are in Him and yet not in Him, He is in them and yet not in them. This is the description of God in the language of mortal man. Indeed He soothes man by revealing to Him all His aspects by using all kinds of paradoxes. All beings are in Him inasmuch as all creation is His; but as He transcends it all, as He really is not the author of it all, it may be said with equal truth that the beings are not in Him. He really is in all His true devotees, and is not, according to them, in those who deny Him. *What is this if not a mystery, a miracle of God?*[189]

Once this state of rapture is achieved nothing more is needed for us to be able to say simultaneously that He has form as well as that He is formless, that He *desires* the status of pure consciousness, and also that He is *without* any desire.[190] "Proofs" are no longer relevant now. How can Brahman be both the material as well as the operative cause at the same time, Ramanuja is asked. After all, there are *two*, the clay, the material, and the potter, the operator, who are needed to make the pot. And what is his response? "We simply remark," he says, "that the highest Brahman which totally differs in nature from all other beings, which is omnipotent and omniscient can by Itself accomplish everything. There is nothing unreasonable in ascribing all possible powers to Brahman which differs from all other beings. We perceive that fire, water and so on, which are of different kinds, possess different powers, *viz.*, heat and so on; there is, therefore, nothing unreasonable in the view that the highest Brahman which differs in kind from all things observed in ordinary life should possess innumerous

188 *The Gita According to Gandhi*, *op. cit.*, p. 226.
189 *The Gita According to Gandhi*, *op. cit.*, p. 267.
190 *Tripuratapini Upanishad*, 7.

powers not perceived in ordinary things . . . ."[191] Thus, as He can do anything and everything, where is the difficulty in His containing contraries within Himself simultaneously? And as He can contain contraries where is the *contradiction* in the Upanishads when they make contradictory assertions about Him?

But surely when a matter goes so much against our consistent experience shouldn't you give some proof, some argument in favour of the view you are asserting? ". . . In matters vouched for by the Scripture," says Ramanuja, "we must conform our ideas to what the Scripture actually says . . . . As the possession on Brahman's part of various powers (enabling Him, in this instance, to emit the world) rests exclusively on the authority of the *Veda* and thus differs altogether from other matters (which fall within the sphere of the other means of knowledge also), the admission of such powers is not contrary to reason. Brahman cannot be either proved or disproved by means of generalizations from experience . . . . Observations founded on ordinary generalizations have no force against Brahman which differs in nature from all other things . . . ."[192]

Thus, the contradictory passages about Brahman are not really contradictory because He can in fact contain contradictions within Himself. And He can contain contradictions because He can do everything including contain contradictions! And, pray, how do we know that He can? O, from the fact that the Scriptures affirm contradictory things about Him and, as we have just been taught by the great Ramanuja himself, "in matters vouched for by the Scripture we must conform our ideas to what the Scripture actually says. . . ."

But when the occasion comes for considering the Jain view about categories of substances, a view, as will be recalled, that allows the existence of contraries, the *Brahma-Sutra*-s reject the view on the ground that "the presence (of contradictory attributes) in one and the same is not possible." Ramanuja goes along whole-heartedly with this rejection and asserts at length that contradictory attributes such as existence and non-existence, non-permanence and permanence, difference and non-difference, etc., cannot co-exist simultaneously in an entity "any more than light and darkness. . . any more than the generic character of a horse and that of a buffalo can belong to one animal . . . ."[193]

How come Ramanuja asserts this about substances and the opposite about Brahman? O, that's because Brahman is different, He is no substance. While substances cannot contain contradictory attributes simultaneously, Brahman can.

Are you sure?

Of course.

[191] *Vedanta-Sutras, with Ramanuja's Commentary, op. cit.*, pp. 400, 401, 474.

[192] *Ibid.*, pp. 474-475.

[193] *Vedanta-Sutra, with Ramanuja's Commentary, op. cit.*, pp. 516-519; Shankara's com- [...] of Shankaracharya, *op. cit.*, pp. 426-429.

But if that is so obvious why does old Shankara come along and say, "one cannot comprehend that the same Brahman can be possessed of the attributes of change and changelessness,"?[194] Why does he say, "the supreme Brahman, considered in Itself, cannot logically have both the characteristics; for it cannot be admitted that the very same thing is naturally possessed of attributes like form, etc., and that It is also without these, for that is self-contradictory"?[195] Why does he say, . . . "the same entity cannot have many natures . . . ."?[196]

As you are so certain that Brahman can contain contraries simultaneously, why does Shankara say all this? Just his cussedness, is it?

In any case, and this is the next device that is used to put the matter beyond inquiry, the great secret, the true nature of reality is beyond rational discourse. While Brahman has been "seen," "experienced" by seer after seer, He is in essence incomprehensible. Does the *Kena Upanishad* not say

> There the eye goes not; speech goes not, nor the mind. We know not, we understand not. How would one teach It . . . Other, indeed, is It than the known, And moreover above the unknown. Thus have we heard of the ancients, who to us have explained It . . . .[197]

Does the *Taittiriya* not speak of the goal as being one "wherefrom words turn back together with the mind, not having attained . . ."?[198] Is it surprising then that seers should have glimpsed different aspects of Him and the Scriptures should record their partial—and, therefore, seemingly contradictory—descriptions? He is beyond comprehension, beyond words, hence the words we use cannot but be mere approximations, they cannot but be more or less wrong. . . .[199]

The most serviceable and in some ways the most elaborate device for papering over the contradictions is the doctrine of the two levels of truth—a lower, *vyavharik*, conventional truth and the higher one. The lower is variously presented as a means to the higher truth or as all that is usually grasped or graspable by the less gifted, by those who have not progressed far enough. Moreover, as it is widely recognized that there is no single, exclusive path, that each aspirant must choose the particular means, the particular lower truth which is suited to his stage, disposition, etc , it follows that *all* means, *all* approximate concepts of the ultimate truth are admissible. There is no scope now for asserting that accounts of Him having thousands

[194] *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya, op. cit.*, p. 332.
[195] *Ibid.*, p. 609.
[196] *Ibid.*, p. 618.
[197] *Kenopanishad*, 1.3.
[198] *Taittiriyopanishad* 2.4.
[199] Noting the apparent differences between the descriptions of a formless Brahman and those of a Brahman with form, Mahadev Desai, in a typical passage, says, ". . . the moment we proceed to apply to Brahman the language of our limited experience we limit It. It is futile to imprison the Infinite in finite categories. This *shloka* (*Gita*, XIII. 12) is really the key to the apparent contradictions in the *shloka*-s that follow." Cf, *The Gita According to Gandhi, op. cit.*, p. 319. That ends the argument!

of eyes, thousands of ears, etc., conflict with accounts of Him as the eyeless, earless, formless one. One account is but a means to help us visualize, to experience the other. "One attains the transcendent Brahman while yet entirely immersed in the *Shabda*-Brahman," we are told; one account is the one that the less adept will grasp, the other is what is meant for the more proficient.

The doctrine starts by being merely supra rational: "You cannot see that which is the Witness of vision . . . you cannot know that which is the Knower of knowledge . . . .," says the *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*[200]; "The Self is that which has been described as 'Not-so, not-so'," it continues, "It is imperceptible for It is never perceived . . . "[201]; the *Mundaka* refers to the Self as "that which cannot be perceived and grasped,"[202] as one that "is not comprehended through the eye, nor through speech, nor through the other senses, nor is It attained through austerities or *karma* . . . "[203]; "that (Brahman) is surely different from the known, and again, It is above the unknown," says the *Kenopanishad*,[204] and goes on to affirm, "Brahman is known to him to whom It is unknown, while It is unknown to him to whom It is known. It is unknown to those who know and known to those who do not know";[205] the Self, says the *Gita*, is "unmanifested, *unthinkable* and unchangeable."[206] But while the doctrine starts by being merely supra-rational, in practice these assertions become an anti-reason dogma and thus help rule out *from the very beginning* rational inquiry into the texts, into the basic premises. Reason, instead of being a device that is useful but which must ultimately be transcended, becomes *from the very beginning* a snare, a device that is inimical or at best irrelevant, to the quest. Revelation, we are told, does not require proof. As the *Atmopanishad* says,

> What proof does one require for recognizing from experience (a pot) as 'This is a pot'? So long as that (pot) is there, there arises the perception of the article, without (the necessity for) any clear proof. If there is incontrovertible proof, this Atman manifests Itself as the eternal and ever-established truth and does not stand in need of a place, nor time, nor purity (of mind therefor). Cognition of the kind such as, 'I am Devadatta,' does not stand in need of any testimony. Even so, the perception of this (Atman), in the attitude, 'I am the Brahman,' by the knower of the Brahman, (does not stand in need of any testimony). What can cause the manifestation of that (Brahman), through whose radiance as through (the radiance of) the Sun, is rendered manifest the phenomenal world, which is not the Atman and which is non-existent and insignificant? Can the *Vedas*, the *Shastra*-s, the *Purana*-s and all living beings, which derive their significance only through that (Brahman), enlighten the knower of that (Brahman)?[207]

200 *Brihad-Aranyakopanishad*, 3.4.2.
201 *Ibid.*, 3.9.26.
202 *Mundakopanishad*, 1.1.6.
203 *Ibid.*, 3.1.3.
204 *Kenopanishad*, 1.4.
205 *Ibid.* [illegible]
206 *Gita*, 2.25.
207 *Atmopanishad*, 5-10.

Accordingly, the persistent pupil meets with silence,

> He (Baaskali) said, 'Teach me Brahman, sir.' He (Baadhva) became silent. When the question was repeated a second and a third time, he said, 'I have already spoken but you cannot comprehend (the answer). That Self is Quiescence'. . . .[208]

or with the enigmatic monosyllable,

> Questioned by the gods as to how this non-differentiated *Turya* of the form of eternal existence, sentience and bliss can be described as the *Pranava* of the character of the *Ardhamatra* which is only transient, *Prajapati* answered with the monosyllable '*Om*' alone . . . .[209]

or with a slap-of-a-rebuke for one's interminable questions, for one's doubts:

> Then Gargi Vacaknavi questioned him. 'Yajnavalkya', said she, 'since all this world is woven, warp and woof, on water, on what, pray, is the water woven, warp and woof?'
> 'On wind, O Gargi.'
> 'On what then, pray, is the wind woven, warp and woof?'
> 'On the atmosphere-worlds, O Gargi.'
> 'On what then, pray, are the atmosphere-worlds woven warp and woof?'
> 'On the worlds of the *Gandharva*-s, O Gargi.'
> 'On what then, pray, are the worlds of the *Gandharva*-s woven, warp and woof?'
> 'On the worlds of the sun, O Gargi.'
> 'On what then, pray, are the worlds of the sun woven, warp and woof?'
> 'On the worlds of the moon, O Gargi.'
> 'On what then, pray, are the worlds of the moon woven, warp and woof?'
> 'On the worlds of the stars, O Gargi,'
> 'On what then, pray, are the worlds of the stars woven, warp and woof?'
> 'On the worlds of gods, O Gargi.'
> 'On what then, pray, are the worlds of the gods woven, warp and woof?'
> 'On the worlds of Indra, O Gargi.'
> 'On what then, pray, are the worlds of Indra woven, warp and woof?'
> 'On the worlds of *Prajapati*, O Gargi.'

[208] *Brahma-Sutra Bhashya of Shankaracharya, op. cit.*, p. 612.
[209] *Nrisimha Tapinyupanishad, Uttara-Tapini* [illegible]

'On what then, pray, are the worlds of *Prajapati* woven, warp and woof?'

'On the worlds of Brahma, O Gargi.'

'On what then, pray, are the worlds of Brahma woven, warp and woof?'

Yajnavalkya said: 'Gargi, do not question too much, lest your head fall off. In truth, you are questioning too much about a divinity about which further questions cannot be asked. Gargi, do not over-question.'

Thereupon Gargi Vacaknavi held her peace . . . .[210]

How one wishes that for once Gargi had not held her peace!

Once this way of getting around a question is admitted into the discourse, it becomes a habit, an addiction. Soon enough not just the core—Brahman—is indescribable, much else too is equally indescribable and, therefore, not to be inquired into too closely. As Brahman is non-communicable, *vidya*, the liberating knowledge, which is the realization in one's very being of this indescribable, non-communicable essence, that *vidya* too becomes indescribable, and non-communicable. We have to pause but a breath before we are told that as *vidya*, the realization of the indescribable, is itself indescribable, its converse *avidya*, which is after all *non*-realization of the *same* indescribable, too is indescribable!

> It (*avidya*) is not existent (as the cause is not visible), nor non-existent (as the effect is visible as the phenomenal world), nor both (existent and non-existent, as the two are incompatible). It is not different (from Brahman as it has no independent existence), nor non-different (as it is not a substance), nor both (different and non-different, as that is an impossibility). It is not possessed of parts (as the parts are absent in the cause) nor partless (as the effect is seen to be possessed of parts), nor a combination of both. (Thus *avidya* is indescribable). It is to be discarded by the realization of oneness of Brahman and the Self, for it is the cause of illusion . . . .[211]

With one entity after another becoming indescribable in such quick succession, the discourse slips out of the bounds of enquiry, of rational discussion. Each can now assert what he will about the indescribables and the only aid you have, the only aid you *need*, for accepting what a *guru* tells you or what a text tells you is that magic wand, Faith.

Soon enough faith is the one thing that is extolled to high heaven and those who doubt, who question are reviled, abused. We are assured that we can safely conclude in the case of the doubters that there is "something wrong" with them:

> Wise men aver that, in the case of persons that *have committed heinous*

[210] *Brihad-aranyakopanishad*, III. 6.

[211] *Sarvasaropanishad*, 4.

sins and of those that have accumulated sins through transgressions during several previous incarnations, there is surely generated a strong aversion to wearing the *Tripundra*-mark and sprinkling ashes over the body. In the case of those whose anger is roused at the sight of the *Bhasma*-mark on one's forehead, *their mixed birth*, O Brahmana, *could very well be inferred* by a man of intellect.

In the case of those who have no faith in putting the *Bhasma*-mark prescribed by the *Veda* (or in its sanctity), O Sage, it may be surely posited that *there could not have been administered*, in their case, *the sacraments preliminary to Garbhadhana* (conception in their mother's wombs) and other pre-natal sacraments. Those men who, at the sight of a person wearing *Bhasma*-marks, belabour him with blows, in their case, O Brahmana, *descent from Chandala-progenitors* should be inferred by the man of intellect. It is the deliberate conclusion arrived at by the *Shastra*-s that, in the case of persons whose anger is roused by the wearing of the *Bhasma*-mark or by any reference being made to its having the sanction (of the *Vedas*), *they are tainted due to the influence of the most heinous sins committed by them.* Those that talk disparagingly of wearing the *Tripundra*-mark *slight thereby Shiva alone.* Those that put on such marks with extreme devotion hold Shiva in great veneration. *Fie on that forehead* which is devoid of the *Tripundra*-mark with *Bhasma*! *Fie on that village* which is devoid of a temple dedicated to the worship of Shiva. *Fie on that vidya* which does not bear on the acquisition of the knowledge of Shiva. . . .[212]

Should anyone conceive of anything by way even of reflections of differentiation in the *Turya Turiya* and assume its being broken into hundreds and thousands of fragments, that person, *with his faculties demented*, will attain death after death, passing through series of births and deaths, without attaining the final beatitude of *Turya*. . . .[213]

Doubt is called "dirt,"[214] liberation is reserved for those alone who suspend doubt,

There is liberation for those who are free from doubts; there is no emancipation even at the end of repeated births for those whose minds are invaded by doubts. . . . Hence one should have faith.[215]

destruction is proclaimed as the certain fate of those who doubt,

But the ignorant, faithless, doubting self goeth to destruction; nor this

[212] *Brahajjabalopanishad*, V. 10-17.
[213] *Nrisimha Tapinyupanishad*, *Uttara-Tapini*, IIX. 5.
[214] *Mahopanishad*, II, 74, 77.
[215] *Maitreyopanishad*, 2.17.

world, nor that beyond, nor happiness, is there for the doubting self.[226]

and so the faithful are told not just to banish doubt but also to shun those who have residual doubts about the doctrine:

> Whichever foolish soul takes his stand of making the slightest difference between the *Jivatman* and the *Paramatman, even talking with* him will bring about fearful consequences. . . .[217]

> Now then, the hindrance to knowledge, O king. Verily, *the source of the net of delusion is the fact of the association of one who is worthy of heaven with those who are not worthy of heaven.* That is it. Although a grove is said to be before them, they cling to a low shrub. Now, there are some who are continually hilarious, continually abroad, continually begging, continually living upon handicraft.
>
> And moreover, there are others who are town-beggars, who perform the sacrifice for the unworthy, who are disciples of *Shudras*, and who, though *Shudra*-s know the Scriptures (*Shastra*-s). And, moreover, there are others, who are rogues, who wear their hair in a twisted knot, who are dancers, mercenaries, religious mendicants, actors, renegades in the royal service, and the like. And, moreover, there are others who say 'For a price we allay (the evil influences) of *Yakshas* (sprites), *Rakshasas* (ogres), *Bhuta*-s (ghosts), spirit-bands, goblins, serpents, vampires, and the like.' And, moreover, there are others who falsely wear the red robe, ear-rings and skulls. And, moreover, *there are others who love to be a stumbling-block among believers in the Vedas by the stratagem of deceptive arguments in a circle, and false and illogical examples. With these one should not associate.* Verily, these creatures are evidently robbers, *unfit for heaven.* For thus has it been said: 'By the jugglery of a doctrine that denies the Soul, By false comparisons and proofs, Disturbed, the world does not discern what is the difference between knowledge and ignorance. . ., Verily, Brihaspati (the teacher of the gods) became Shukra (the teacher of the *asura*-s), and for the security of Indra created this ignorance (*avidya*) for the destruction of the *asura*-s.'
>
> By this (ignorance) men declare that the inauspicious is auspicious, and that the auspicious is inauspicious. They say that there should be attention to law which is destructive of the *Veda* and of other Scriptures. Hence one should not attend to this (teaching). It is false. It is like a barren woman. Mere pleasure is the fruit thereof, as also of one who deviates from the proper course. It should not be entered upon. . . .[218]

Faith then and not reason is the first requirement. And what is 'faith'?

[217] Varahopanishad, II. 8.

[216] *Bhagvad-Gita*, 4.40.
[218] *Maitrayaniya*, VII. 8.9.

That which helps us internalize the doctrine without questioning it in any way! It is urged as part of the *niyams* themselves:

> *Astikya*: 'Faith in the *Sruti* and *Smriti* is belief in the existence of the Supreme. . . .'[219]

> *Mati*: 'Confirmed belief in all things enjoined by the *Veda* is what is known as faith. One should be devoid of all connection with anything counter to that, even though instructed by the *guru* in that direction. . . .[220]

Thus, to realize that the Scriptures are true, have the faith that they are true!

The doctrine which had begun by being merely supra-rational, which began by saying that *ultimately* reason has to be transcended, now affirms that it isn't much use at all as, to cite the *Brahma-Sutra*-s, "reasoning has no conclusiveness,"[221] as different reasoners give different arguments each for his own point of view, as the arguments go on for ever. And so the doctrine that began by being supra-rational ends up in practice by asking us to shun reason from the very beginning, to have faith to the point of total surrender to the Lord and to remember that reasoning is admissible only when it does not run counter to what is stated in the Scriptures.[222]

> What is related by the *Veda*, that is the Supreme End of existence. There is no doubt about it. Therefrom flow all things. Should there be divergence from the *Veda*, that will not afford sanction. Anything without sanction will contribute towards utter ruin. . . .[223]

Instead of doubting, instead of questioning, instead of enquiring, the aspirant is asked to place all his faith in the *guru*; to treat him as God on earth, indeed as Brahman Himself. Even allowing for the fact that as the texts must have been written by the *gurus* themselves some amount of self-advertisement is bound to creep in, the adulation of the *guru* is indeed florid:

> The *guru* alone is the ultimate limit; the *guru* alone is highest wealth. For the reason that he teaches That, therefore, is the *guru* greater than all else. . . .[224]

> The *guru* is Brahman; the *guru* is Vishnu; the *guru* is always the Lord Achyuta; greater than the *guru* there is no one whatsoever in all the three worlds. One should worship with extreme devotion the *guru* who

219 *Darshanopanishad*, II. 6.
220 *Darshanopanishad*, II. 11.
221 *Brahma-Sutra-s*, 2.1.11. See the almost identical enthusiasm with which both Shankara and Ramanuja greet this pronouncement.
222 *Manu*, 12.106.
223 *Brahmavidyopanishad*, 32-35.
224 *Advaya-Tarakopanishad*, 18.

imparts divine wisdom, who is the spiritual guide, who is the Supreme Lord Himself. For him there will be the fruit of *Jnana*. Even as the *guru*, so is *Ishvara*.. Even as the *Ishvara*, so is the *guru*. He should be adored with great devotion There is no difference between these two. One should not engage in debate, on equality of status with the *guru* anywhere. With devotion, one should contemplate in his mind the identical character of the *guru*, God and the Atman. . . .[225]

A person should ever develop devotion to the *Guru*, for attaining great excellence. The *guru* alone is Hari incarnate, so says the *Shruti*. . . .[226]

When the *yogin* gets the secret of performance from the mouth of his *guru*, then alone does he attain success therein, as described in the series of books relating to the *vidya*. . . .[227]

Now shall I explain the true nature of the practice of *yoga*. The seeker should always serve that *guru* by whom has been successfully accomplished the conquest of *Prana*. The wise practitioner should achieve the conquest of the *Prana* (vital air) out of his *guru's* gracious oral instructions. . . .[228]

Then, the inner sense (of the seeker) yearns for the side-glance of the great and good *guru*, in consequence whereof, all achievements are accomplished through the potent influence of the side-glance of the great and good *guru*. All bonds burst asunder. All obstacles to the attainment of final beatitude get dissolved. All powers and glories come of their own accord. Even as in the case of a man born blind there is no perception of the form, even so, without the initiation thereinto by the *guru*, attainment of the knowledge of the real existence, (the Brahman), (by the seeker) there cannot be, even after the lapse of crores of *kalpa-s* (eons). Hence, through the potent influence of the slightest side-glance of the *guru*, knowledge of the truth dawns upon the mind of the disciple in no time. . . .[229]

The Self is not attainable even by a hundred expositions, not by the study of countless scriptures, not through the means of intellectual knowledge, not through brain power, not through the (study of the) *Vedas*, not through severe austerities, not through the *Samkhya* (knowledge), not through *yoga* (discipline), not through the (observance of the four) stages of life, nor through any other means do people attain the Self. Only through a rigorous study and through discipline and devoted service to the knowers of Brahman, do they attain (the Self). . . .[230]

[225] *Brahmavidyopanishad*, [illegible]
[226] *Yogashikhopanishad*, I. [illegible]
[227] *Yogashikhopanishad*, V. 56-59.
[228] *Yogakundalyupanishad*, II. 1-17.
[229] *Tripadvibhuti-Maha-Narayanopanishad*, II. V. 7.
[230] [illegible]

We are exhorted to venerate the *guru* as God-incarnate,[231] as the Supreme,[232] to serve him always and in every particular. Indeed, we must serve and venerate not just him but his wife and sons too.[233]

Just as the pupil is asked to subject himself entirely to the *guru*, to swallow all the *guru* tells him, the *guru* is told to ensure that the pupil is one who will carry the doctrine forward in its undiluted, unquestioned form. He is told again and again that he must be extremely careful in transmitting the knowledge—the Great Secret—so that he does not entrust it to those who are liable to be uncertain about it themselves and are thus liable to inject the poison of doubt before passing it on to the next generation.

The *guru* is exhorted to treat the teaching as "a secret more profound than the profoundest secret" and to impart it only to one who venerates him as he venerates the Supreme (that is, to one who will take his word for it), to the pupil whose mind is tranquil (that is, to one who has stilled the agitation of doubt and desires), to one who has implicit faith in the deity, in the *Vedas*, to one who is close to him (like his eldest son), to pupils whom he has observed and thoroughly tested for extended periods such as a year, to the one of austere vows, a true devotee of God and his *guru*, who is sincere in his devotion to the quest, who is full of fidelity to the *guru* and is earnest in receiving his grace,—in brief, to one who is ready to accept it all on faith; to one who has noble ancestors, to one who has sons and devoted disciples of his own to whom he can likewise transmit the knowledge and thus ensure its perpetuation. (The *guru* is also asked occasionally to verify that the pupil's conduct is good, that he possesses moral excellence, that he is not a rogue, an ingrate, a liar, a wicked or rude man, a man who is either proud or a sycophant. Apart from the fact that an ingrate, a liar, a wicked man may not be in a position to learn the Great Secret, this is also sound pracctical advice; if such men were to be the transmitters of the doctrine, the laity would soon lose regard for it and thus not internalize it as it must be internalized for it to play its role in strengthening the existing order.) The

[231] *Brahmavidyopanishad*, 48.

[232] *Paingalopanishad*, IV. 8. In this matter, as on so many others, the *Gita* cuts both ways. There is a stirring call to rely on oneself: "Let a man raise himself by himself, let him not lower himself; he alone is the friend of himself, he alone is the enemy of himself. To him who has conquered himself by himself, his own self is the friend of himself, but to him who has not (conquered) himself, his own self stands in the place of an enemy like the (external) foe" (6.5, 6). In another verse enquiry is said to be one of the means to knowledge (4.34). But then doubt is assailed—"the ignorance, the faithless, and one of doubting self, is ruined. There is neither this world, nor the other, nor happiness for one of doubting self" (4.40), and we are told again and again to devote ourselves to seeking His grace "without cavilling" (*e.g.*, 3.31, 32), by completely surrendering oneself to Him, by "exclusive devotion" (*e.g.* 8.22, 11.48, 53-4). Along with the call to "lift oneself by oneself," goes the admonition against neglecting scriptural ordinances (16.23) and the dictum that "the Scripture is the authority in deciding what ought to be done and what ought not to be done. . ." (16.24). In the very verse (4.34) in which enquiry is said to be a means to knowledge are mentioned long prostration and service of the *guru* as co-equal means. And so on.

[233] *Subalopanishad*, XVI.

10

CONSEQUENCES–III: CACOPHONY, REPRESSIVE TOLERANCE AND FIDEISM

We have seen that while the dominant view in the Upanishads is uncompromising and unambiguous, the texts are marked by numerous contradictions. The contradictions are at many levels. There is above all the contradiction between the dominant doctrine and life: between a doctrine that asserts that the phenomenal world is not even real and the very real pangs of hunger, of suffering. There are then contradictions within the doctrine itself: as we noticed, for instance, it speaks on the one hand of redemption *via* progressively better reincarnations and on the other of all being Brahman already and always. There are contradictions between the assertions of the doctrine about the unreality of the phenomenal world and those that tell us to perform rituals, sacrifices, a veritable panoply of very this-worldly acts—if the entire world is unreal then why should *I* be performing all these rituals, etc.? Yet the official ideologists could ill-afford to allow us to arrive at questions of this kind—their livelihood itself depended on the rituals, sacrifices, observances that the questions would led us to doubt. Moreover, there was an even more obvious contradiction between the doctrine and the daily practice of the ideologists themselves, a contradiction that must have caused much derision among the laity, one that was certainly pounced upon by the *Charvaka*-s: if the world was unreal, if the body was such an obstacle, why did the seers and priests eat, why indeed did they do so much more than just eat, why did they collect and hoard all that wealth for dispensing their w...om? Di... the Upanishads themselves not testify how many cows and how many pieces o... the seers raked off for their words of wisdom?

Thus, there were contra...d... tion, as we have seen, develo...tions galore. To paper over these the tradition... forcing propositions: shun re...d a web of interlocking and mutually reintradition, the texts, do your thinkin... said, have faith, let your *guru*, the be very careful to pass the tradition on... you; the *guru*, in turn, was told to forward without diluting or questioning o those who were sure to carry it protect the doctrine from rational que...; new adjuncts were invented to truth, the tradition said; the Absolute can'oning—there are two levels of it said, hence all the contradictory propositntain contradictions in Himself, Absolute is incomprehensible as well as indeis are simultaneously true; the that the texts use cannot but be inadequate...ribable, it said, so the words Brahman, it reminded us, different words, eve...well as erroneous; as all is

rising above the pair of opposites, about the need for each to follow the path suited to his endowments and his stage of development, what words does it use to describe the one group—the materialists—that poses a real challenge to its world-view? It declares them to be "demoniac," it declares that "these ruined souls of small intellect, of fierce deeds, rise as the enemies of the world for its destruction," it declares them to be "filled by insatiable desires, full of hypocrisy, pride and arrogance, holding unwholesome views through delusion," to be "bound by hundreds of bands of hope, given over to lust and wrath (who) strive to secure by unjust means hoards of wealth for sensual enjoyment," to be "self-honoured, stubborn, filled with the pride and intoxication of wealth," to be "given over to egotism, power, haughtiness, lust and anger, these malicious people. . . "; and as its forecast for them it pronounces as follows: "bewildered by many a fancy, entangled in the snare of delusion, addicted to the gratification of lust, they fall into a foul hell"; and just so that things are not left to chance the author makes Krishna himself declare, "These cruel haters, worst of men, I hurl these evil-doers for ever in the worlds, into the wombs of the demons only," and as a consequence, "entering into demoniac wombs the deluded ones, in birth after birth . . . pass into a condition still lower than that. . . ."[1]

Do such words reflect tolerance or even equanimity? And do you think that the generations after generations of devotees who memorized the *Gita* and took every word of it to be revelation, do you think that they learnt tolerance by memorizing such adjectives about the *one* group that stood apart?

The more important point to remember in this context is that tolerance is not a virtue in all circumstances just as intolerance is not a vice under all circumstances.

Just as detachment degenerates into callousness, so also this tolerance becomes indifference. To tolerate the deeds of an oppressor is to perpetuate his power. Why should a social system that heaps suffering on millions be tolerated? How is it virtuous to tolerate it? Is it not under the alibi of "toleration" that we have shut our eyes to practices of various sects which harm their adherents?

The same basic position holds in the realm of ideas. After all, not all ideas are equally valid representations of truth. Why then should all of them be retained? What are we to say of a tradition that never gets around to jettisoning anything? Passages after passages in the Upanishads, for instance, hark back to a time when man still thought that nature was controlled by superhuman beings who could be cajoled into behaving differently by magical devices. In what sense is it virtuous for a tradition to "tolerate" these passages and practices forever?

"But do you not see that the tolerance which the wide variety of philosophical positions exemplifies was not mere indifference? It was an active tolerance. Do we not have records that tell us how *Shudra*-s reached the very

[1] *Bhagvad Gita*, 16, 6-20.

top of the social system?"

Lamentably, the cases are so few as to be rare exceptions. There is a more important clue than the fewness of the numbers of *Shudra*-s that figure as having been honoured: even as individual *Shudra*-s might have climbed out of the quagmire in which they had been born, the system which kept the overwhelming mass of them in the quagmire did not change.

Moreover, the individual *Shudra* who attained the status of honour in the records of the doctrine was one who had internalized the notions of the doctrine, one who had, in fact, become a Brahmin in his very psyche. What these exceptions testify to, then, is not tolerance but co-option, what we are seeing at work is not a society tolerating those who oppose it but a society that is co-opting the ring-leaders of those who might oppose it. The reader sensitive about our heritage will perhaps find the point more palatable by recalling the function that such co-option has served and continues to serve in other settings:

> This circumstance, that a man without wealth, but with energy, strength of character, ability and business sense, is able to become a capitalist, is greately admired by the economic apologists of capitalism, since it shows that the commercial value of each individual is more or less accurately estimated under the capitalist mode of production. Although this situation continually brings an unwelcome number of new soldiers of fortune into the field, and into competition with the existing individual capitalists, it also consolidates the rule of capital itself, enlarges its basis, and enables it to recruit ever new forces for itself out of the lower layers of society. In a similar way, the circumstance that the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages formed its hierarchy with the best brains from among the people, without regard to estate, birth or wealth, was one of the principal means of consolidating priestly rule and the subordination of the laity. The more a ruling class is able to assimilate the most prominent men of the dominated classes the more stable and dangerous is its rule.[2]

> . . .the absorption of the enemies' *elites* means their decapitation and annihilation often for a very long time. . . . Indeed the attempt is always made to ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority. . . . Between consent and force stands corruption/fraud (which is characteristic of certain situations when it is hard to exercise the hegemonic function, and when the use of force is too risky). This consists of the demoralization and paralysis of the antagonist (or antagonists) by buying its leaders—either covertly or, in cases of imminent danger, openly. . . . If you study all Italian history since 1815, you will see that

[2]K. Marx, *Capital*, Volume III, cited in T. B. Bottomore and Maximilien Rubel, *Karl Marx, Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*, C. A. Watts, London, 1963, p. 190.

> a small ruling group has succeeded in methodically absorbing into its own ambit the entire political personnel thrown up by the various, originally subversive, mass movements. . . .leaving only an insignificant residue, whose significance was more folkloristic than historico-political. The phenomenon was called 'transformism'. . . .[3]

What we are seeing in the isolated *Shudra* who makes it to the honoured circle is not active tolerance but the active co-option of the organic intellectuals of the oppressed groups, the co-option of perspicacious individuals who, had they remained to fester in their original surroundings, may have caused trouble. The conditions on which co-option takes place are in no doubt: to rise to be a Brahmin, to remain one in spite of your birth, you must internalize the notions that help maintain the hegemonic system that is being so gracious as to lift you up, you must henceforth be its agent, you must help perpetuate the present arrangements under which the poor tolerate the riches of the rich as quietly as the rich tolerate their poverty.

"But you mean, someone actually sat down and thought this thing through? You mean someone actually and consciously manufactured this instrument of co-option for defanging the oppressed classes so as to leave them impotent?" We should not try and discover motives. It is enough for us to look at the effects. A social system is a living organism. It develops—without any "conscious" effort as we see so clearly in the lower, *i.e.*, simpler, forms of life—the devices it needs to survive and perpetuate itself. And the Hindu organism had millenia in which its instincts for survival themselves—i.e., without the intervention of conscious design—gave rise to such devices. Moreover, we cannot presume that the Hindu hegemonic system was any less perceptive in discovering methods for sustaining itself than other systems have been. Indeed, going only by the texts, it has been, as I have noted earlier, one of the best articulated hegemonic systems. For that reason I would presume that if devices such as co-option were ever discovered and manipulated consciously in any system then our system has had a better chance of being this single instance than any other system. Manu, Chanakya and the lot would outdo a Machiavelli any day. We should not forget that it is in this system that elaborate, intricate and mutually reinforcing device—rituals, respect for authority, details of family life, social intercourse, an academic syllabus that emphasized rote memorization and swallowing rather than critical examination—it is this very system which developed the devices that would be most effective in making individuals internalize the basic premises of the doctrine. It is this very system which built up a panoply of extreme sanctions to ensure that all used these devices. The system was hardly oblivious to perpetuating itself. And it is this very system, which came to realize that once the notions have been successfully internalized by the subject, there is no need to be overtly intolerant. Indeed,

[3] A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1973, pp. 59, 80, 128.

then tolerance is not just permissible, it is prudent. Where is the need to overtly and continuously manipulate a man after you have conditioned his thought, after he has come to mouth your views as his own, after he has learnt to view heteronomy as autonomy?[4]

Nor should we fall into the trap of regarding the variety of viewpoints as testimony of the rugged independence, the sturdy individualism of the Hindu seers, their love of free thinking, of untrammelled enquiry. The tradition certainly did not honour free thinking. Some of the harshest abuses in it, abuses excelled in their ferocity only by the abuses that have been hurled at the *Charvaka*-s, have been reserved for the free thinkers. Much of Indian philosophy, the output of most of contemporary Indian philosophers dealing with our tradition included, has been uncritical; so tradition-bound has it been as to have been almost at the level of mere memorization and recitation. A Shankara who develops the tradition creatively has come once in hundreds of years. A thinker who will repudiate its basic social premises—who will, for instance, locate the cause of individual suffering in the social nexus—has been a complete rarity. To go on adding stitches after stitches of embroidery to the same worn-out piece of cloth is hardly to give proof of one's rugged individualism and sturdy independence.

And what if rugged individualism was indeed the dominant trait of the Hindu character and this is what was being reflected in this diversity of philosophical beliefs? Is individualism a virtue under all circumstances? In an inequitous world, whom does this individualism serve? The "individualism" of the rulers—whether this be the passion of a prince for a particular delicacy or the passion of a philosopher for a particular dogma—merely means that each of them has his own eccentricity which he cultivates to some length. It has no social consequences beyond this. The system, the system that works in their favour, is not endangered. In spite of their eccentricities, they are well enough organized. Even if they are not organized overtly as private citizens, the State is the concentrated and organized violence which keeps the system working in their favour. But the same "individualism," the same insistence on going one's own way, among the dispossessed has disastrous consequences for them: they fail to organize, to get together with others who are similarly placed, they even fail to perceive the identity of their interests; each spends his life pursuing his "individual interest"—*i.e.*, making whatever private "deals" he can as an individual with his particular oppressor—and thus the system which holds them all in thrall continues unchallenged.

In brief, two points are involved in the matter. First, we must not tout "tolerance," "individualism" as traits that are virtues under all circumstances. They are virtues under some circumstances and disastrous vices under other circumstances. Secondly, and this is what is relevant to the discussion

[4]Cf. R.P. Wolff, Barrington Moore Jr. and Herbert Marcuse, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1970, *et passim*.

of the previous chapter, we should abandon the notion that it was the active commitment to some value such as "tolerance" or an active character-trait such as "individualism" which resulted in the wide diversity of views around the dominant one. The explanations are much more mundane and they do not constitute occasions for excessive self-congratulation.

One of the things that explains the diversity, as we have noted above, is an historical accident: the philosophical tradition that has been codified in the *Vedas* including in them the Upanishads, developed as an oral tradition for centuries before it was set down in texts; all sorts of diverse aphorisms, folklore, conjectures, premises, inferences, were developed in the oral stage, a particularly fecund stage in our development; all these were set down in the compendia; the compilation of the compendia seems to have coincided with the loss of the race's earlier vigour and self-assurance; no one now questioned what had been set down in the texts, no one now jettisoned anything, no one now had the self-confidence to bring out a revised edition from which what was obviously dated, what was obviously contradictory had been ironed out.

Another part of the explanation for the persistence of these diverse passages and the schools that were erected on their basis is, as we noted earlier, a purely intellectual one. As the basic premises of the doctrine were all unverifiable, no controversies could be settled conclusively. Moreover, once the ideologist had chosen the basic view that he would want the populace to interiorize he was bound by its logical corollaries to be "tolerant" enough to allow varying formulations of it. Having insisted that in the ultimate analysis the Absolute was unknowable, the doctrine had to concede that each of the separate and varying descriptions of reality may have some truth in it. Having maintained that nothing happened except by His will, that He was the only creative agent, the ideologist could not turn around and insist that no other formulation than the one he had put forward had any grain of truth in it. After all, if everything that happens, happens at His command, if He is the only creative agent, *He* must have brought my rival's formulation into being as much as He did mine. Thus, having chosen or, over centuries, developed the basic world-view which I would want the populace to interiorize, I was bound—like an artist is bound by the limitations of the material he has chosen to work with—I was bound to be tolerant enough of varying formulations of it.

Explanations such as the historical accident or the intellectual imperatives of the corollaries that followed from the doctrine, all these are but proximate explanations. The features of the doctrine that we have encountered—the obsession of breaking out of this worldly existence, the denial of the importance of empirical relationships, the denial of the phenomenal world itself, the view of the man-made social world as a God-given, immutable order, the number, variety and persistence of different formulations, the view of nature as something that is controlled by superhuman beings, the much greater reliance on ideology than overt force as an instrument by which hegemony is to be maintained—each of these features can be traced

the community acts here with the irresistible authority of a law of Nature, while each individual artisan, the smith, the carpenter, and so on, conducts in his workshop all the operations of his handicraft in the traditional way, but independently, and without recognizing any authority over him. The simplicity of the organization for production in these self-sufficing communities that constantly reproduce themselves in the same form, and if destroyed, by chance, spring up again on the same spot and with the same name—this simplicity supplies the key to the secret of the unchangeableness of Asiatic societies, an unchangeableness in such striking contrast with the constant dissolution and refounding of Asiatic States, and the never-ceasing changes of dynasty. The structure of the economic elements of society remains untouched by the storm-clouds of the political sky.[5]

The small peasant proprietors form an immense mass, the members of which live in the same situation but do not enter into manifold relationships with each other. Their mode of operation isolates them instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse. This isolation is strengthened by the wretched state of. . .means of communication and by the poverty of peasants. Their place of operation, the small-holding, permits no division of labour in its cultivation, no application of science and therefore no diversity of development, variety of talent, or wealth of social relationships. Each individual peasant family is almost self-sufficient; it directly produces the greater part of its own consumption and therefore obtains its means of life more through exchange with nature than through intercourse with society. The small-holding, the peasant, and the family; next door, another small-holding, another peasant and another family. A bunch of these makes up a village, and a bunch of villages makes up a department. Thus the great mass of the nation is formed by the simple addition of isomorphous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes.[6]

The correspondence between these features of the technological base, the pattern of economic life and the philosophical postures is direct and unambiguous. As the technological base did not change for centuries on end, the ideological superstructure too did not change in fundamentals. As the communities continued to live in isolated settlements, as production processes within communities continued to be unintegrated, varying formulations, differing "schools" could sprout, flourish and continue to lead their independent lives for centuries on end. As survival was so difficult, so exhausting, as man was so helpless against nature and the social organization, he could think of no greater joy than the reassurance that he would never have

[5] K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, in Bottomore and Rubel, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-110.
[6] K. Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in K. Marx, *Surveys from Exile*, Vintage, N. York, 1974, pp. 238-239.

to be born again. As this life was wretched, as the material life was agonizing he developed spheres of compensation in ideas, in fantasies. And the whole thing was capped by "...the nonsensical judgement of the philosophers that the real man is not man," which is, "in the sphere of abstraction, merely the most universal, all-embracing expression of the actually existing universal contradiction between the conditions and the needs of the people."[7]

The explanations for the philosophical ideas, therefore, are to be found not in a supposed commitment to "tolerance" or a supposed character-trait such as "sturdy independence" or "rugged individualism" but in the real world. Similarly, the way to alter those ideas is to alter the world that gave rise to them.

A TRUTH THAT IS FALSE

Features of the real world such as the ones that have been alluded to kept the philosophical tradition going around in circles. The initial collections—the *Vedas* were encyclopaedic, mixing the important with the unimportant, folklore with myth, myth with fact, chant with empirical observation, the verifiable with the unverifiable. As these encyclopaedic collections were given the status of divine revelation each of the various formulations that was later to sprout and take root got an anticipatory validation. Each new school, each new variant of an existing school, could display the required passages from this corpus. Schools and variations of schools arose one after another and each new school, like its predecessors, was arrayed on the shelf for display. In a life that was more or less settled, in a society that was more or less static, philosophy became an academician's pursuit. The momentum of the discipline itself took over. The philosophers lost themselves in scholastic disputes.

Each formulation could justify itself by reference to some notion or the other in the encyclopaedic compendia. The basic, ultimate premises of the doctrine as a whole were beyond empirical verification. As the doctrine explained away empirical phenomena, there was little question of confronting it with empirical reality. Far from agreeing on the facts and deductions, different schools insisted on having their own notions even about what was and what was not an admissible basis for assertion, observation and deduction. Was *shabda-pramanda* a legitimate basis or not? Was inference permissible or not? Even these ground-rules were never settled unambiguously. As agreement could not be obtained even on the criteria by which the relative merits of different formulations might be assessed, no paradigm could overwhelm the others. All formulations continued to be equally valid.

Each new thinker, say, a Ramanuja, dissatisfied with the tradition as it was, would conjure up an alternative set of equally unverifiable, indescriba-

[7] K. Marx, F. Engels, *The German Ideology*, in K. Marx, F. Engels, *Collected Works*

ble concepts, work out the logical implications of these concepts and assumptions and thus set up his own "system." But, mindless embroidery apart, the potentialities of a new "system" such as this too were soon exhausted. Once the inferences had been drawn, the inconsistencies ironed out, there was nothing to be done except to memorize, repeat, memorize, repeat, memorize. . . and go on swearing loyalty by your particular "system," a "system" that was and would remain at par with all the others.

Soon enough the tradition became merely enumerative. Classifications followed classifications, groupings followed groupings, lists followed lists. And as little was done with these classifications, groupings, lists, none of them led to any breakthrough. Like the life and society it reflected, the tradition continued to hover at an unchanging altitude for centuries and centuries. The very "richness"—now more and more in the sense of "volume"—of the tradition became a handicap. The intellect was now weighed down by the debris accumulated over the ages, just as life was weighed down by the accumulations of customs, rituals, beliefs, superstitions of centuries. Work in philosophy now came to consist overwhelmingly of collating, classifying, comparing, annotating and, of course, of swallowing and vomitting.

The doctrine of two levels of truth came in as the universal glue. It was put forward both as a proposition of expedience as well as a fundamental truth. On the one hand, we were told that as capacities of individuals differ it is necessary to put forth propositions at different levels of abstraction (a *saguna*-deity at one level, a *nirguna*-deity at another and an entity about whom nothing could be said at a third). On the other hand, we were told that the reality-quotient of phenomena was in fact twofold: a proposition that is true from a *vyavharik*, conventional point of view is false from the point of view of the higher truth.

This turned out to be one of the most serviceable inventions in the arsenal. It reconciled irreconcilables, it explained away contradictions within the doctrine, between theory and practice, between the doctrine and life. Serviceable, yes. But an *ex post facto* rationalization nontheless, an assertion occasioned by necessity, but a mere assertion. What is this "truth" which is really false? True enough that the "rope-seen-as-a-snake" is not a snake. But is it at least a rope or not? Is the snake-seen-as-a-snake real or not? "Well," mumbles our philosopher, "it is real from a practical point of view." But how come—except by your saying so—does the higher truth negate this practical point of view? The thesis of two truths was itself an admission that the tradition in its anxiety to explain away the empirical world, in its anxiety to turn our sights away from it, had got carried away. Even if we concede, to use the similie of the Upanishads, that the clay is the substratum of the pots of different shapes and sizes, even if we concede that as such it in some sense represents "the essential unity" of the pots, can we from this jump to deny the existence of the pots completely, can we from this assert that the pots are no more than mere "verbal modifications" of the clay?

A mere *ex post facto* invention conjured up to take care of the excesses of the doctrine itself, the thesis of two levels of truth became a handy instrument in the hands of the ideologists. While it was meant to paper over the contradictions in the doctrine itself, between the absolutist doctrine and life, it ended up introducing double-think into the very heart of the corpus. In practice it, like other parts of the doctrine, reached the masses in a vulgarized version. It had rationalized differing formulations by asserting that individuals were at differing levels of development in their spiritual quest, it ended up rationalizing hierarchy itself, it became a justification for dual morality—a moral code by which we would conduct ourselves if the world was as it was under *Ramrajya* and the actual, expedient code by which each of us lived in this *Kaliyuga*, it became a justification for differing moral codes—one code for Aryans and another for non-Aryans, one code for those who wore the sacred thread and another for those who did not, one code for caste Hindus and another for outcastes, one code for one caste and another for a second caste, one code for individuals in one age-group and another for individuals in another age-group, one set of punishments for a crime committed by individuals from one caste, another set of punishments for the same crime committed by individuals from another caste. And so on.

The thesis about differing capacities of individuals, of their differing levels of spiritual development, hence of the need for perceiving truth at two levels, correctly mirrored at an intellectual level a phenomenon of the real world—it mirrored a division of labour that had divided society into compartments so that clergy, rulers, merchants, labourers were now leading entirely separate lives. What was right for one group was no longer right for another group. The capacities of one group were no longer accessible to another group. Just as some groups or some individuals were capable of grasping the higher truth and others had to seek solace in the lower truth, so also some were there to be served and others had to seek solace in serving them.

GURU-VAADA

Another device that we noticed in Chapter 9 as being used to paper over contradictions was the exhortation to put one's faith in the *guru*, to look upon him as the Brahman Himself. The *guru* must have gained his importance initially from the fact that the knowledge that was available had not been written down. It had to be acquired personally from someone. Hence his importance. Later as so many diverse propositions, devices, etc., came to be codified, the notion was put forward that the *guru* alone could guide one through the maze, that he alone could judge my stage of development, my current capacities and accordingly prescribe the device, whether this be a *Mantra*, a *mala*, an exercise in meditation, an *asana* or whatever that was best suited for me.

These assertions about surrendering oneself to one's *guru*, of delegating

one's thinking function to him are important as they exemplify the general notions about authority that the tradition developed, notions that directly serve the interests not just of the *guru*-s but of the ruling classes as a whole.

The basic propositions here are threefold; first, that I do not have the capacity to find my own way as my current capacities and attainments are limited; second, that it is, therefore, imperative that I should follow the prescriptions of another; and, third, that to be able to do so, I must completely surrender myself to him, in particular, I should completely delegate my thinking function to him. An individual who has internalized these notions and has conditioned himself to such abject acceptance of authority in the spiritual realm shall be equally servile to authority in the temporal realm. The premises that underlie *guru-vaada* have a direct correspondence to the attitudes that help the temporal rulers: my capacity to comprehend the empirical order is limited, the capacity of the rulers—who, after all, have been put in their exalted places by Brahman Himself in accordance with *Rita* as well as their particular *karma*—their capacity to interpret as well as direct the empirical order is much greater than mine; as they have been put there by Brahman Himself and as nothing happens except in accordance with *Rita*, there must be a higher purpose to the empirical world as well as the empirical arrangements which on the surface seem to crush me and work to their advantage . . . . Nothing serves a ruler or a ruling class more than that the subjects should delegate to him their thinking function, that they should make-believe that everything he does as well as everything that happens has a purpose that is higher than them as well as the ruler, that in acting the way he does, the ruler is not trying to further his personal interests but that in doing so he is just being the agent of another, higher Being, that he is but the instrument—indeed, often, the reluctant instrument—of His designs.

And where should these notions be drilled into the individual? In the one institution through which every individual just *has* to pass—the family—where else? It was in the family that repressive socialization was begun and almost completed. It was the shop-floor in which children were cast in the authoritarian mould. A key element in the entire process of repressive socialization was to cast the child's notions to authority in a particular and unchanging die. This was done both by drilling these notions into the child directly—drilling into him respect and deference for the authority of the elders, for instance, just because they were elders—and indirectly by developing a character pattern—marked by a permanent sense of guilt, inhibitions and inadequacy—that would lead later to a compulsive search for authority figures.

The family was the best school for internalizing these notions which later on, when they had become nature, would be so very useful to the rulers. The usefulness of the family as the factory for permanently reproducing these character-traits consisted precisely in the fact, as Marcuse citing Calvin was to note in another context, that "since subjection is actually repugnant to human nature, man should, through a type of subordination which by its

nature is pleasant and will arouse the minimum of ill-will, be gradually prepared for types of subordination which are harder to bear. This preparation (in the family, in attitudes to the father, to elders, etc.) occurs in the manner of a softening, bowing and bending; it is a continual habituation, through which man becomes accustomed to subjection. . . ."[8]

The repressive socialization of the family was taken up and carried forward to adoloscence in the relationship that one was supposed to have towards the *guru*. The feelings of guilt and inadequacy—so useful for developing in one a compulsive submission to authority—were intensified, first by positing an absolutist goal that could almost never be attained (for it implied a behaviour pattern which at its purest was predicated on the complete non-existence of the phenomenal world) and then by widening the net of repression to cover sex, desires of all kinds, even feelings and emotions.

No wonder the rulers patronized the official ideologists of the tradition with such ostentatious lavishness, no wonder, as the Upanishads record, the rulers lavished gold and coins and every other boon they could on them. And for the same reason it is no wonder that successive rulers have exhorted us over the centuries and, in the garb of asking us to honour our glorious heritage, continue to exhort us even today to internalize these very notions. They have wanted us and they want us even today to do their work for them.

[8]Herbert Marcuse, "A Study on Authority," in his *Studies in Critical Philosophy*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1972, pp. 77-78.

11

GANDHI AND THE TRADITION

The original and at all times the principal impulse for the practice of a people comes from the objective circumstances in which they labour and live. The objective conditions in which men wrestle with nature, with each other, with the social world they have created, these conditions and not some abstract doctrines determine their conduct. The doctrines themselves arise from and reflect the objective conditions. Take the doctrine of *karma*, for instance. It has become a fashion to present it as a reason for fatalist resignation, for the belief that I can do little except sit back as my present is irrevocably determined by my past deeds. But the doctrine could as well be a spur for action, for defiant struggle. After all, according to it the inter-temporal link is not just between my past deeds and my present state but also between my present deeds and my future state. If the former rather than the latter link is what comes to dominate my psyche, the cause is to be sought not in the doctrine of *karma* but in the objective conditions in which I labour—conditions in which the results of my efforts depend so much on factors that are beyond my control that I am crushed by a feeling of helplessness.

In spite of this primary relationship between life and doctrine there is a reason for focussing on the doctrine, on the ideology that dominates a people's psyche. When they are viewed in a dynamic setting over time the base and the ideology stand in a dialectical relationship to each other and not in a relation of unilateral dependence. The base gives rise to the ideology; the ideology in turn reinforces the base. Changes in the base initiate changes in ideology; the latter in turn reinforce and accelerate changes in the base. As the base changed little in India, an ideology that reinforced the base came to be perfected and internalized; it congealed and came to acquire a palpable grip over the collective psyche itself; it became, as Marx said of ideas at a time of ferment and upheaval, a material force. The opposite instance—when stirred after millenia, changes in ideology take flight, when they run ahead of the base and accelerate changes in the latter—is exemplified by the revolutions in Russia as well as China. Mao himself was to note later on that revolutions had not proceeded strictly according to Marx's forecast: it had not been the case that the base had advanced sufficiently, thus enabling the revolutionary forces to capture the superstructure; rather the sequence had been the opposite one—by a complex process, revolutionary forces had captured the state

accelerated changes in the base. Only the pedants, the formula-Marxists, who insist on reducing dialectical materialism to mechanical determinism, refuse to see the role of the subjective element, of the world-view that has come to prevail in the collective psyche. Those who have participated in actual struggles—Lenin, Mao, Gandhi and others—have never underrated the importance of the subjective element.[1] They have worked hard at understanding the subjective state—including in this the prevailing world-view—of the forces of change and at changing it. They recognized the bind in which society was caught: the base determined consciousness; unless they were to sit back and wait for the base to change autonomously and in the meantime to put up with the privations of the prevailing order, people themselves had to consciously rise and change the objective conditions; but the very people who were to do this were lost in the fumes of an erroneous world-view, a world-view that kept them from lifting themselves in the only way that was open to them, that is, by their bootstraps. That is why men like Lenin, Mao, Gandhi did not spend their lives working at transforming the base, they did not become technologists and engineers; rather they worked on the superstructure and within this most of all on transforming the subjective state of the masses.

Gandhi's appearance, some of his fads and experiments, his idiom often led observers, specially Indians who had received Western education, to the notion that he was a throw-back, a traditionalist who wanted to hurl us

[1]Marx himself never scoffed at the importance of the subjective element. A subtle thinker, he was no mechanical determinist. He always emphasized interdependence, interpenetration of phenomena, of relationships, of base and superstructure. Engels too dismissed as "fatuous" the notion that "because we deny an independent historical development to the various ideological spheres which play a part in history, we also deny them any effect upon history" (K. Marx, F. Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975, p. 435). "The basis for this," he continued, "is the common undialectical conception of cause and effect as rigidly opposite poles, the total disregard of interaction. These gentlemen often almost deliberately forget that once an historic element has been brought into the world by other, ultimately economic causes, it reacts and can react on its environment and even on the causes that have given rise to it" (*ibid*; for similar remarks of his see also his letters to Conrad, 5 August, 1890, to Schmidt, 27 October, 1890 and to Borgins, 25 January, 1894 in *Selected Correspondence, op. cit.*). In arguing the necessity of revolution itself, Marx and Engels state that revolutions—massive as well as drastic—are necessary "not only because the ruling class . . . cannot be overthrown in any other way but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fit to found society anew . . ." (K. Marx. F. Engels, *The German Ideology*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1974, p. 86). In the letter to Mehring that has been cited earlier (*Selected Correspondence, op. cit.*, p. 433-437) Engels faults Marx and himself for often having stressed the economic influences excessively, for neglecting, as he says, the form for the content; he explains that this imbalance of presentation arose because at the time their chief concern was to combat those who had always pictured ideas and ideologies as developing autonomously. That these extreme presentations cannot be sustained is easily shown: see, to cite just one critique, E. Kamenka, *The Ethical Foundations of Marxism* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1972, Chap. 13.

back to the *Vedas*. Such a notion arose primarily because these observers were not familiar with what our tradition really was. The reaction of the orthodox Hindus and Jains was much more to the point in this respect. They abused and detested Gandhi precisely because they could see—as the "moderns" never could—what he was up to, they could see how he was completely overturning the doctrine even as he insisted—and, what from their point of view was worse, *believed*—that he was firmly rooted in the tradition. Like a true revolutionary, he looked into his people's psyche, he found out the notions that were holding them in thrall and he led them into struggles which would commence the process of transforming those notions.

In this concluding chapter I shall sketch some of the ways in which Gandhi transformed the tradition from within and some of the ways in which he completely repudiated it, to show how, even as he left many expressions within the parentheses as he had found them, he changed the sign outside the parentheses. I shall then suggest that we now need to take his task farther and that in doing so we will be well advised to jettison a few concepts which, while they were of the highest subjective importance to him, keep us from getting to the kernel of his contribution towards recasting the tradition.[2]

SHABDA-PRAMANDA

To his everlasting credit and to our great advantage Gandhi was no academic scholar. He did not read the Upanishads, the *Gita*, etc., as a scholar, that is, he did not study them analytically. He read them as one traveller reads the accounts of other travellers.

He never bothered to read the corpus as a whole. But what he read convinced him that the texts, though useful, could never be elevated to being the final arbiter. He rejected *shabda-pramanda* and in its place, in place of the oracular status of the *guru* and the seer, he affirmed the right as well as the competence of each individual to ascertain the truth for himself.

His affirmations on this question and the freedom with which he interprets the *Gita*, the freedom with which he imposes meanings on it, illustrate his attitude to authority in general and, therefore, have an importance that transcends the question of *shabda-pramanda*. In his affirmations as well as in the way he derives his meanings from particular verses, we see at work the process by which he was to carve out a sphere of autonomy for the individual.

The principal texts, he used to say, suffer from a process of "double distillation" in that, firstly, they come to us through a human prophet and, secondly, through the commentaries of interpreters; nothing, he would say, comes from God directly and the Mathews and Johns are apt to give diffe-

[2]This chapter is by no means a comprehensive treatment of Gandhi's thought. It deals solely with points that arise directly from chapters 1 to 10.

ring versions.[3] Moreover, he would say, even in regard to these transcriptions we do not have the original texts of the volumes, "we do not even know that a *rishi* named Manu ever lived."[4] His reading had convinced him, he said, that there were very many interpolations in what passed for *Smriti*, that much in them (for instance, the prescriptions to perform animal sacrifices) was dated and specific to the practices that prevailed centuries ago, that much in them was contradictory,[5] and that, therefore, we should bring out a new edition of the scriptures.[6] He was reviled for such heresy. But, as is well known, he was not apt to withdraw a far-reaching suggestion such as this one merely because the orthodox pounced upon it as heresy: "The certainty that the whole mass of Hindus and the persons accepted as religious leaders will not accept the validity of such authority (the authority of the revised edition of the scriptures) need not," he reassured us, "interfere with the sacred enterprise. Work done sincerely and in the spirit of service will have its effect on all in the long run and will most assuredly help those who are badly in need of such assistance."[7]

His basic attitude to the scriptures, therefore, was that they were the-not-always-reliable records of conclusions arrived at by explorers in search of truth, explorers who, while they may have been greater and better explorers than himself, were not qualitatively different from him; it wasn't the case, for instance, that they were incarnations and he was not. Given this attitude, it was natural for him to claim that he would subject all they had said to the test of his own reason, his own experience:

> .... I would reject all scriptural authority if it is in conflict with sober reason or the dictates of the heart. Authority sustains and ennobles the weak when it is the handiwork of reason, but it degrades them when it supplants reason sanctified by the still, small voice within.[8]

> ... blind worship of authority is a sign of weakness of mind....[9]

> Let us not deceive ourselves into the belief that everything that is written in Sanskrit aud printed in *Shastra*-s has any binding effect upon us. That which is opposed to the fundamental maxims of morality, that which is opposed to trained reason, cannot be claimed as *Shastra* no matter how ancient it may be....[10]

> I accept no authority or no *Shastra* as an infallible guide...Hinduism is not a codified religion.... We have in Hinduism hundreds and thou-

[3] *Harijan*, 5.XII.1936. A very large number of passages on these matters can be cited from the seventy volumes of Gandhi's *Collected Works* that have already appered. I shall cite just a few to give the reader a glimpse into Gandhi's attitude on these matters.

[4] *Harijan*, 6. IV. 1934.

[5] *Harijan*, 28. XI. 1936.

[6] *Ibid.*, 7. X. 1936.

[7] *Harijan*, 28. IX. 1934.

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] *Young India*, 8. XIII. 1920.

[10] *Ibid.*, 20. X. 1927.

sands of books whose names we do not even know which go under the short name of *Shastra*-s. Now, when I want to find out whether a thing is good or bad, I do not go to a particular book but I look to the sum total of the effect of Hinduism. In Hinduism we have got an admirable footrule to measure every *Shastra* and every rule of conduct and that is Truth. Whatever falls from Truth should be rejected, no matter where it comes from and, therefore, the burden lies with the person who upholds a practice which is inconsistent with Truth, so that if a man wants to defend, for instance, untouchability, he has to show that it is consistent with Truth. Unless he shows that, all the authorities he may cite as support for it are to be irrelevant....[11]

"And where do you find the seat of authority?," he was asked. "It lies here," he said, pointing to his breast, "I exercise my judgment about every scripture, including the *Gita*. I cannot let a scriptural text supersede my reason.... I cannot surrender my reason whilst I subscribe to divine revelation. And above all 'the letter killeth and the spirit giveth life'...."[12]

How could he claim so much for himself? "My own conscious claim," he says with his customary directness, "is very simple and emphatic. I am a humble but very earnest seeker after Truth."[13] It is precisely on this basis that he justified the particular interpretations he put on individual verses of the *Gita* as well as on the central message of the text as a whole:

> It has been my endeavour, as also that of some companions, to reduce to practice the teaching of the *Gita* as I have understood it. The *Gita* has become for us a spiritual reference book.... The accompanying rendering contains the meaning of the *Gita* message which this little band is trying to enforce in its daily conduct....This desire (of placing before the people a new and reliable rendering of the *Gita*) does not mean any disrespect to the other renderings. They have their own place. But I am not aware of the claim made by the translators of enforcing their meaning of the *Gita* in their own lives. At the back of my reading there is the claim of an endeavour to enforce the meaning in my own conduct for an unbroken period of forty years....[14]

Here we have a man to whom *shabda-pramanda* is no *pramanda*. Here is a man to whom texts that others hold in superstitious reverence are mere guides—some more helpful, others less—mere guides left by earlier voyagers. And they are not idle texts, fit for scholastic disputation. They are guides that have to be used for perfecting oneself for real struggles. Shankara also says at one point, does he not, that scriptures are useless—useless for the one who does not attain liberation and useless as well for the one who does? But even so Shankara is preoccupied with the very same

[11] *Ibid.*, 29. IX. 1927.
[12] *Ibid.*, 21. IV. 1927.
[13] *Harijan*, 5. XII. 1936.
[14] *The Gita According to Gandhi*, ...

scriptures. Gandhi is not preoccupied with them. He is preoccupied with life, with the actual struggles that the masses must wage. Here is the difference between scholastic disputation and life, between exegetical polemics and real struggles.

For Gandhi the particular expressions that figure in a text such as the *Gita*—a text that he revered above all others—are but the expressions *of a poet*, not the revealed words of God, and as they are just a poet's bequest he has no compunction in reading such meaning into them as accords with his own experience.

> In assessing the implications of renunciation of fruit, we are not required to probe the mind of the author of the *Gita* as to his limitations of *ahimsa* and the like. Because a poet puts a particular truth before the world, it does not necessarily follow that he has known or worked out all its great consequences, or that having done so, he is able always to express them fully. In this perhaps lies the greatness of the poem and the poet. A poet's meaning is limitless. Like man, the meaning of great writings suffers evolution. On examining the history of languages, we notice that the meaning of important words has changed or expanded. This is true of the *Gita*. The author has himself extended the meanings of some of the current words. We are able to discover this even on a superficial examination. It is possible that, in the age prior to that of the *Gita*, offering of animals as sacrifice was permissible. But there is not a trace of it in the sacrifice in the *Gita*-sense. In the *Gita* continuous concentration on God is the king of sacrifices. The third chapter seems to show that sacrifice chiefly means body-labour for service. The third and the fourth chapters read together will give us other meanings for sacrifice, but never animal-sacrifice. Similarly has the meaning of the word *sannyasa* undergone, in the *Gita*, a transformation. The *sannyasa* of the *Gita* will not tolerate complete cessation of all activity. The *sannyasa* of the *Gita* is all work and yet no work. Thus the author of the *Gita*, by extending meanings of words, has taught us to imitate him.[15]

Having claimed as much, Gandhi does not shirk from stretching the meaning of words and passages, he does not shirk from drawing fairly imaginative inferences from them. Consider the first verse of the Gita's sixth discourse:

> He who performs all obligatory action, without depending on the fruit thereof, is a *sannyasin* and a *yogin*—not the man who neglects the sacrificial fire nor he who neglects action.

And what does Gandhi infer from this verse? Spinning of all things:

Ibid., p. 133.

Fire here may be taken to mean all possible instruments of action. Fire was needed when sacrifices used to be performed with its help. Assuming that spinning were a means of universal service in this age, a man neglecting the spinning wheel would not become a *sannyasi*.[16]

Here is verse 35 of the third discourse:

Better one's own duty, bereft of merit, than another's well-performed; better is death in the discharge of one's duty; another's duty is fraught with danger.

In his commentary Gandhi's inference is quite straightforward and to the point:

One man's duty may be to serve the community by working as a sweeper, another's may be to work as an accountant. An accountant's work may be more inviting, but that need not draw the sweeper away from his work. Should he allow himself to be drawn away he would himself be lost and put the community into danger. Before God the work of man will be judged by the spirit in which it is done, not by the nature of the work which makes no difference whatsoever. Whoever acts in a spirit of dedication fits himself for salvation.[17]

but it is also from this verse that he "derives" *swadeshi*:

Pure service of one's neighbours cannot be disservice to those who are remotely situated; rather the contrary. A man who allows himself to be lured by the distant scene and runs to the ends of the earth for service, is not only foiled in his ambition but fails also in his duty towards his neighbours. That seems to me to be the sense of the verse. Interpreted in terms of one's physical environment this gives us the law of *swadeshi*. *Swadeshi* is *Swadharma* applied to one's immediate environment.[18]

Here is verse 14 of the third discourse.

From food springs all life, from rain is born food; from sacrifice comes rain and sacrifice is the result of action.

And here is the imaginative construction Gandhi puts on the verse:

Here there is propounded the theory of body-labour, called by Tolstoy bread-labour, which becomes *Yajna* or sacrifice when performed selflessly for others. Rain comes not through intellectual feats but through

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 228.
[17] *Ibid.*, p. 188.
[18] *Young India*, 18. VI. 1931, cited in *The Gita According to Gandhi*, pp. 188-189.

sheer bodily labour. It is a well-established scientific fact that where forests are denuded of trees rains cease, where trees are planted rains are attracted and the volume of water received increases with the increase of vegetation . . . . Who knows all the ill effects, moral and physical, of the cessation of body-labour?[19]

The word "sacrifice" provides another illustration. When in verse 9 of the third discourse Krishna tells Arjuna that "this world of men suffers bondage from all action save that which is done for the sake of sacrifice; to this end, O Kaunteya, perform action without attachment," Gandhi maintains that "action for the sake of sacrifice means acts of selfless service dedicated to God."[20] In recounting verse 25 of the fourth discourse where also the word "sacrifice" is crucial,[21] three different meanings of the word are noted: first, there is Shankara's affirmation that *yajna* is the Self and, therefore, "the realization by the conditioned self of its identity with the unconditioned Self is itself this sacrifice"; second, we are told that "*all* the processes or incessant endeavour of the self to reach and be one with the Supreme are an act of sacrifice . . ."; and, third, comes the meaning attributed to a commentator that sacrifice is "the sacrifice of the very consciousness that one is making a sacrifice, *i.e.*, reducing oneself to utmost nothingness."[22] By the time we come to verse 20 of the ninth discourse, the conventional meaning of the word "sacrifice" just cannot be evaded. The verse says:

> Followers of the three *Vedas*, who drink the *soma* juice and are purged of sin, worship Me with sacrifice and pray for going to heaven; they reach the holy world of the gods and enjoy in heaven the divine joys of the gods.

Gandhi now affirms the conventional meaning but dismisses the reference to *soma*:

> The reference is to the sacrificial ceremonies and rites in vogue in the days of the *Gita*. We cannot definitely say what they were like nor what the *soma* juice exactly was.[23]

Just as reference to *soma* is here dismissed by refusing to speculate about its meaning, the reference to *shradha* rites in *shloka* 42 of the first discourse[24] is dismissed by Mahadev Desai on the plea that "the reference is

[19] *The Gita According to Gandhi*, *op. cit.*, pp. 178-179.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 175.

[21] The verse is, "Some *yogins* perform sacrifice in the form of worship of the gods, others offer sacrifice of sacrifice itself in the fire that is Brahman."

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 273.

[23] *Ibid.*, pp. 204-205.

[24] Verses 41 & 42 are: "When unrighteousness prevails, O Krishna, the women of the family become corrupt and their corruption, O Varshneya, causes the confusion of *varna-s*. This confusion verily drags the family-slayer, as well as the family, to hell, and for want of obsequial offerings and rites their departed sires fall from blessedness."

to the prevailing practice. It does not mean that the author regarded it as necessary. In fact, there is no second mention of the rite in the Gita."[25] Unless one takes the basic position of Gandhi that the text is a mere guide that each of us is free to assess and interpret in the light of his own experience, even a little reflection will show that none of these reasons is conclusive. After all, if the text is indeed the revealed word then the fact that a rite is mentioned only once does not make it less important than another that has been mentioned more than once; similarly, as we noted while discussing Tilak's evasive dodge around a similar reference to "sacrifices," the efficacy of a rite is not diluted merely because it was at one time "the prevailing practice" and is not so now.

Just as I.42 suggests that one's state is affected by whether or not the *shradha* rites are performed for one, there are a number of passages in the *Gita* (and, of course, as we have seen in earlier chapters, in the Upanishads) which assert that one's subsequent well-being is affected by the manner of one's death:

> And he, who, at the last hour remembering Me only, departs leaving the body, enters into Me; of that there is no doubt."
>
> Or whatever form a man continually contemplates, that same he remembers in the hour of death, and to that very form he goes, O Kaunteya.
>
> Therefore at all times remember Me and fight on; thy mind and reason thus on Me fixed thou shalt surely come to Me.
>
> Whoso, at the time of death with unwavering mind, with devotion, and fixing the breath rightly between the brows by the power of *yoga*, meditates on the Sage, the Ancient, the Ruler, subtler than the subtlest, the Supporter of all, the Inconceivable, glorious as the sun beyond the darkness,—he goes to that Supreme Celestial Being.
>
> Closing all the gates, locking up the mind in the *hridaya*, fixing his breath within the head, rapt in *yogic* meditation;
> Who departs leaving the body uttering *A U M*—Brahman in one syllable —repeatedly thinking on Me, he reaches the highest state.
>
> Now I will tell thee, the conditions which determine the exemption from return, as also the return, of *yogin*-s after they pass away hence.
>
> Fire, Light, Day, the Bright Fortnight, the six months of the Northern Solstice—through these departing men knowing Brahman go to Brahman.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 146.

> Smoke, Night, the Dark Fortnight, the six months of the Southern Solstice—therethrough the *yogin* attains to the lunar light and thence returns.[26]

We have seen the convolutions that the Shankaras, Ramanujas and Tilaks go through when confronted with these assertions. By contrast Gandhi's dismissal of these notions is prompt and final. Referring to the last two verses quoted above, he says

> I do not understand the meaning of these two *shloka*-s. They do not seem to me to be consistent with the teaching of the *Gita*. The *Gita* teaches that he whose heart is meek with devotion, who is devoted to unattached action and has seen the Truth must win salvation, no matter when he dies. These *shloka*-s seem to run counter to this. They may perhaps be stretched to mean broadly that a man of sacrifice, a man of light, a man who has known Brahman finds release from birth if he retains that enlightenment at the time of death, and that on the contrary the man who has none of these attributes goes to the world of the moon—not at all lasting—and returns to birth. The moon, after all, shines with borrowed light![27]

The next verse (VIII.26) clearly continues the reference in VIII.24, 25 to the dark and light periods in which one dies:

> These two paths—bright and dark—are deemed to be the eternal paths of the world; by the one a man goes to return not, by the other he returns again.

but by now Gandhi has put his own construction on the reference to "bright and dark." "The bright one," he says, "may be taken to mean the path of knowledge and the dark one that of ignorance."[28]

Gandhi's reaction to verses 41-44 in discourse XVIII provides yet another instance. The verses, as is well known, refer to qualities and functions of different castes:

> The duties of *Brahmin*-s, *Kshatriya*-s, *Vaishya*-s and *Shudra*-s, are distributed according to their innate qualifications, O Parantapa.
>
> Serenity, self-restraint, austerity, purity, forgiveness, uprightness, knowledge and discriminative knowledge, faith in God are the *Brahmin*-s natural duties.
>
> Valour, spiritedness, constancy, resourcefulness, not fleeing from battle, generosity, and the capacity to rule are the natural duties of a Kshatriya.

[26] *Bhagvad Gita*, VIII-5-7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 23-25.
[27] *The Gita According to Gandhi*, p. 262.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 264.

> Tilling the soil, protection of the cow and commerce are the natural functions of a *Vaishya*, while service is the natural duty of a *Shudra*.

Gandhi gets around the problem—an ossified division of labour—of which these verses are a symptom by asserting that the ascription of qualities and functions is not exclusive at all:

> To say that a Brahmin should not touch the plough is a parody of *Varnashrama Dharma* and a prostitution of the meaning of the *Bhagvad-Gita*. Surely the qualities predominantly ascribed to the different divisions are not denied to the others. Is bravery to be the prerogative only of the *Kshatriya* and restraint only of the Brahmin? Are *Brahmin*-s, *Kshatriya*-s and *Shudra*-s not to protect the cow? Can any one remain a Hindu without readiness to die for a cow?[29]

While Krishna in the *Gita* tells us that "the order of the four *varna*-s was created by Me according to the different *guna*-s and *karma* of each," (IV.13), while Arjuna talks of the "confusion of *varna*-s" that follows corruption among the women of a community as if he were talking of miscegenation (I.41, 43), Gandhi puts his own construction on the notion of *varna*:

> The *Gita* does talk of *varna* being according to *guna* and *karma*, but *guna* and *karma* are inherited by birth. The law of *varna* is nothing if not by birth. But there is no superiority implied here. Brahmanism is the culmination of other *varnas* just as the head is the culmination of the body. It means capacity for superior service, not superior status. The moment superior status is arrogated, it becomes worth to be trampled underfoot.[30]

Verses 23 and 24 of the sixteenth discourse tell us to abide by the *Shastra*-s:

> He who forsakes the rule of *shastra* and does but the bidding of his selfish desires, gains neither perfection, nor happiness, nor the highest state.

> Therefore let the *shastra* be thy authority for determining what ought to be done and what ought not to be done; ascertain thou the rule of the *shastra* and do thy task here (accordingly).

Most would take the verses to be directing us to abide by the rules, rites, etc., laid down by the codifiers of the *dharmashastra*-s. But Gandhi is emphatic: "*shastra* does not mean the rites and formulae laid down in the

[29] *Young India*, 22. I. 1925.

[30] *Ibid.*, 24. XI. 1927.

so-called *dharmashastra*, but the path of self-restraint laid down by the seers and the saints. . . . Let no one be a law unto himself but take as his authority the law laid down by men who have known and lived religion."[31] The formulation is typical of Gandhi: he says in one breath that we must abide by "the law laid down by men who have known and lived religion" and in the next that the rules and rites prescribed in the *dharmashastra*-s (which, according to the tradition, have been written down by "men who have known and lived religion") are not the law, rather the law is what he is telling us it is—"self restraint" in this case, *anasaktiyoga* in another.

The sequence by which Gandhi reaches such formulations and the calm self-confidence that underlies it are noteworthy. He will say that the "*Gita* is the key to the knowledge of the *shastra* . . . .It sums up the whole of the *shastra*. . . ."; then that "nothing that is inconsistent with the main theme of the *Gita* is *shastra*, no matter where it is found printed";[32] next that "the main theme" of the *Gita* is *anasaktiyoga*, the *yoga* of desirelessness, of the renunciation of fruit, of complete detachment;[33] and, finally, that his "forty years' unremitting endeavour fully to enforce the teaching of the Gita in my own life" has convinced him that "perfect renunciation is impossible without perfect observance of *ahimsa* in every shape and form."[34] Hence, by the end *Ahimsa* is the *shastra*.

The sequence exemplifies his attitude to authority, to the authority claimed by scriptures, *guru*-s, elders, in fact by anyone other than his own "small still voice within." He decides which of the numerous scriptures contains the essence of all of them; he decides what is the essence of this particular text; he decides what is the prerequisite for abiding by this essence, this central teaching. And he claims the authority to do all this on the ground that he himself is an earnest and determined seeker of truth. What a refreshing change. Here is a man who thinks for himself. Here is a man who, on one basis of a surgical, unsparing and remitting examination of his own practice, puts himself at par with other "men who have known and lived religion." And here at last is a man who has the calm self-assurance to claim as much authority as the texts, the *guru*-s and the saints on the basis of one single thing—his own practice.

It can indeed be argued on the basis of the internal evidence of the *Gita* that one of Gandhi's principal claims—the claim that the *Gita* supports his doctrine of *Ahimsa*—is really just another imaginative construction.

It will be instructive to pause for a minute and examine this claim as the final illustration of Gandhi's attitude to the texts and to authority in general.

Gandhi, as is well known, claimed that the *Gita* "was not a historical work, but that, under the guise of physical warfare, it described the duel that perpetually went on in the hearts of mankind and that physical warfare was brought in merely to make the description of the internal duel more

[31] *The Gita According to Gandhi*, p. 352.
[32] *Ibid.*, pp. 125-134.
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 351.
[34] *Ibid.*, pp. 133-134.

alluring. . . ."[35] On this reasoning he maintained that Kurukshetra was not the battlefield but our own body ". . .where the eternal duel between Right and Wrong goes on. . .," that the Kauravas were not actual people but only the representation of "the forces of Evil," just as the Pandavas were the representation of "the forces of Good."[36]

Now, these substitutions—the inner war for physical war, the body for Kurukshetra, the base instincts for Kauravas, the higher instincts for Pandavas—are unsustainable on the basis of much in the *Gita* itself.

For instance, in all of the second discourse Krishna is at pains to distinguish the body from the soul and to argue that no sin attaches to slaying the bodies of the Kauravas. If the latter were only our base instincts, then why should Krishna go through this long argument? If all Krishna is asking him to do is to slay his base instincts then why would He also have to keep assuring Arjuna that he should not bother about any sin attaching to him as a consequence of doing so? Why should Arjuna keep referring to them as his kith and kin,[37] as ones who are worthy of reverence,[38] as ones having killed whom he would have no desire to live?[39] If the Kauravas were just his base instincts why would he fear that "sin only can be our lot if we slay these, usurpers though they be"?[40] Why should he plead helplessness arguing "how can we help recoiling from this sin, seeing clearly as we do the guilt that lies in such destruction (of the family)"?[41] Why should he feel that "having slain them I should have but blood-stained enjoyments"?[42] All the arguments of Krishna too suggest the implausibility of Gandhi's construction. If the Kauravas are just one's base instincts why should Krishna be forever assuring Arjuna that in slaying them he incurs no sin, because in slaying them he does not slay the soul,[43] because Krishna Himself has slain them already,[44] when has Arjuna or anyone else felt that in slaying his base instincts he will be incurring a sin? Why should Krishna be telling Arjuna that he need not grieve over those whom he must slay as they will be reborn in another body[45]—does Arjuna want to be reassured that the base instincts he is being asked to slay will not banish forever? If the Kauravas were merely one's base instincts, where would the question be of exhorting Arjuna to do his duty "for there is no higher good for a *Kshatriya*

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 127.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 138. Mahadev Desai reminds us that Gandhi stated these propositions again and again: "The *Gita*" Gandhiji has said in another connection, "is not a historical discourse. A physical illustration is often needed to drive home a spiritual truth. It is the description not of war between cousins but between the two natures in us—the Good and the Evil." Also: "I regard Duryodhana and his party as the baser impulses in man, and Arjuna and his party as the higher impulses. The field of battle is our own body. An eternal battle is going on between the two camps, and the Poet-seer vividly describes it. Krishna is the Dweller within, ever whispering to a pure heart" . . . cited in *The Gita According to Gandhi*, p. 136.

[37] *Bhagvad Gita*, I. 31-4, 37.

[38] *Ibid.*, II.4, 5.

[39] *Ibid.*, II.6.

[40] *Ibid.*, I.36, 45.

[41] *Ibid.*, I.39.

[42] *Ibid.*, II.5.

[43] *Ibid.*, II.17, 19-21, 24, 25, 30, for instance.

[44] *Ibid.*, XI. 32-34, for instance.

[45] *Ibid.*, II. 13, 22, 26, 27, for instance.

than a righteous war," where would the question be of assuring him that "such a fight, coming unsought, as a gateway to heaven thrown open, falls only to the lot of happy *Kshatriya*-s,"[46]—if the only fight that is being talked of is the fight against one's base instincts why should it be specially propitious for *Kshatriya*-s alone?

One can go on in this vein. The point must have been obvious to Gandhi himself: "let it be granted," he says after giving various arguments for his particular association of Kauravas with base instincts, etc., "let it be granted that according to the letter of the *Gita* it is possible to say that warfare is consistent with renunciation of fruit." The argument by which he settles the matter illustrates the point at issue: "*after forty years' unremitting endeavour fully to enforce the teaching of the Gita in my own life*," Gandhi says, "I have, in all humility, felt that perfect renunciation is impossible without perfect observance of *ahimsa* in every shape and form."[47] Hence, the final argument is his own experience, not some text.

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

The critique of the dominant world-view that has been sketched in Chapters 3 to 10 is based on a particular view of man, of the social world, of nature. This view has been elaborated by a very large number of thinkers, in particular by Marx.[48]

In this view man is distinguished by his potential. The potential itself is not a once-for-all given quantum; it is a process. Moreover, it is not externally given. Man himself by his labour and in association with his fellow men redefines his potential, his constraints, his opportunities, his goals at each step. Thus, from this perspective man is a self-creative being, a social being. Nature is no longer an alien, hostile entity. It is the medium through which—by appropriating and humanizing which—man realizes his potential. The social world is a man-made world; nothing in it has any purpose other than or higher than the purposes man sets for himself; nothing in it has a legitimacy other than or higher than the legitimacy with which man endows it. Man, the self-creative, social being, is not an

[46] *Ibid.*, II. 31, 32. [47] *The Gita According to Gandhi, op. cit.*, pp. 133-134.

[48] Marx's views on these matters are spread over a number of his works. The reader may want to begin with his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. As his early writings have received a great deal of attention in the last forty years, a number of useful commentaries are available. The reader will find the following contributions to be representative as well as informative: H. Marcuse, "The Foundation of Historical Materialism," in his *Studies in Critical Philosophy*, Beacon, Boston, 1973; Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*, M I T Press, Boston, 1971; John Plamenatz, *Karl Marx's Philosophy of Man*, Oxford, 1975; Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, Ungar, N. York, 1970; B. Ollman, *Alienation*, Cambridge, 1971; I. Meszaros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation*, Merlin, London, 1970; also B. Baczako, "Marx and the Idea of the Universality of Man," M. Fritzhand, "Marx's Ideal of Man," and A. Schaff, "Marxism and the Philosophy of Man," in E. Fromm (ed.), *Socialist Humanism*, Allen Lane, London, 1967.

abstraction. He is the empirical man of flesh and blood, a sensuous limited being. Therefore, his suffering is real—it has empirical as well as ontological significance. Man's potential and his suffering have both an inward as well as an outward dimension. At each stage both are conditioned by the nexus of social relations in which individuals find themselves. At each stage, the principal agents for changing this nexus so that human potential may be more fully realized, the principal agents are those who happen at that stage to be weak, disadvantaged. It follows, then, that the only touchstone by which others may judge an individual and by which he may judge himself is the extent to which he is actively helping remove the obstacles in nature and in the social world which are preventing the full realization of man's potential. It follows also that the task of leadership at each stage and in all spheres is to define their situation for the currently weak, to summarize their experience for them and to lead them into struggles through which they can extend the frontiers of human potential.

Viewed from this perspective Gandhi has been the greatest emancipator in our history thus far and the most original social thinker that we have had since the Buddha. While the Western-educated Indian is obsessed by Gandhi's dress, his appearance, his idiom, it must by now be clear to the reader that in almost every particular Gandhi revolutionized the tradition to make it more humane.

His practice, for instance, contrasted so very sharply from the practice of the Ramana Maharshis and the Ramakrishnas. They are preoccupied with realizing their "self" and this quest leads them to an inner-directed, introspective endeavour. Gandhi too talks of realizing his "self." But in his lexicon the word and its import have been transformed by subtle changes. He convinces himself that he can realize this "self" only when other selves are liberated from their suffering. For him, therefore, the means to self realization is no longer an obsessively inward-directed effort; rather the means is service to one's fellow man. What had come to be regarded by the tradition as the means to self-realization—whether these be meditation, or *pranayama*, or reciting the *Vishnu-Sahasranama*—become for him means at second remove, means to means, so to say; they become devices by which an individual may hone himself into a better instrument for socially relevant struggles, the struggles in turn being the means to self-realization.

Similarly, Gandhi restores the balance between the inward and outward dimensions of freedom. He refuses to recognize a state as inner freedom which coexists with outer, empirical slavery, privation and injustice. Far from being non-existent, the empirical world and its relationships are for him the *dharmakshetra*. He correctly locates the roots of much of the suffering of his fellowmen in the man-made social world in which they are trapped. He refuses to grant any superhuman legitimacy to institutions and practices. He sees through them, he correctly identifies the interests they are serving, the institutions and practices that others sanctify and revere he dubs as being but "the convenience of the powerful." His ethic is a universal one in that it is a single uniform ethic for all men. It is a social

ethic in that it demands of each that he consecrate all he has to socially relevant struggles. These premises lead him to fight British imperialism at one level, untouchability at another, and the avalanche of modern civilization at a third.

The catalogue of the ways in which he radically reformulated the tradition even as he proclaimed that he was firmly rooted in it, this catalogue can be extended many times over. Instead of doing so, I will close the discussion by arguing that Gandhi's practice was far ahead of his formulation, that, in fact, we will be well-advised to set aside some formulations of his for the time being, that by doing so we will better see the true import of his practice.

Subjective Importance

As illustrations I will take the concepts of Truth and God. It is well known that Truth and God were of supreme subjective importance to Gandhi. His life was consecrated to these entities. He regarded his struggles as experiments in realizing Truth and God. He believed that "not a blade of grass moves without His will." He derived courage and self-confidence from his belief that he had thrown himself on God: he reasoned that he had made God his shield and that as none was mightier than Him, there was no need to fear man.[49] He had almost defined away the prospect of failure from his consciousness: he would say that Truth (or God) alone Is and then infer that "if untruth does not so much as exist its victory is out of the question." He held that commitment to and faith in Truth facilitated the observance of other vows[50]: he maintained that in his experience individuals could not observe even individual vows—*e.g.*, continence—unless they reposed faith in a Power infinitely greater than themselves.[51] He was certain that a mechanical adherence even to *ahimsa* would break down without this faith.[52] In brief, the evidence of his life is such that we can readily believe him when he tells us that "I may live without air and water but not without Him. You may pluck out my ears but that will not kill me. You may chop off my nose but that will not kill me. But blast my belief in God and I am dead. . . ."[53]

The reader will readily recall numerous incidents from Gandhi's life which document the power that he derived from his faith in Truth and God. Here I need only mention the staying power that these entities gave him at the most basic level—in sustaining him through the privations of physical hunger. The reader will recall the statement penned on the twentieth day of his fast for communal unity in which he describes the sentiments of Tulsidas's hymn (*Raghuvar tumko meri laj*) as "My Refuge."[54]

[49] *Young India*, 27.VI.1929.
[50] For instance, M K. Gandhi, *From Yeravda Mandir*, Navjivan, Ahmedabad, 1956, *et. passim.*
[51] *Harijan*, 25. IV. 1936.
[52] *Ibid.*, 14. V. 1938.
[53] *Ibid.*, July, 1947.
[54] *Young India*, 9. X. 1924.

Or his address to the inmates of his *ashram* upon breaking the week-long fast that he had undertaken when he had learnt about their lapses; in it he described the inspiration he derived on such occasions from the hymn ("*Vaishnav jana to tene kahiye*") and from his belief that Truth is God and untruth a denial of Him.[55] Hence his summary assessment that "...though I bear joyfully the pangs of hunger and many other physical discomforts of fasting, let no one imagine that I do not suffer. These fasts are bearable only because they are imposed on me by a higher power and the capacity to bear the pain also comes from that power. . . ."[56]

Thus, there is little doubt about the subjective importance of Truth and God for Gandhi. Yet I feel that these concepts, though all-important to him, remain as obscure after his accounts of them as they were before him; that we cannot hope to get farther than him in describing their content; that, in fact, the decision to focus on them is self-defeating; that much is to be gained by getting past these words and focussing directly on the central message of his life—that of staking all for human emancipation. We can readily concede that while the content of "human emancipation" is not altogether self-evident, that while there is much room for debate and analysis about the conditions under which humanity will be emancipated as well as about the strategies and tactics that will help us realize those conditions—that while there is much to debate and analyze, our efforts to think these matters through will be just as productive as conjuring new adjectives to describe Truth and God will be futile.

Gandhi on Truth and God

Gandhi's statements about Truth and God fall into five groups[57]; those that assert that the entities cannot be described; those that seem to imply that the entities are everything that is desirable; those that are just tautologies; those that affirm paradoxes; and, finally, those that indicate the manner in which these entities are linked to other concepts important to Gandhi, such as *ahimsa* and love. Many of them echo the Upanishadic statements that we came across in earlier chapters.

I shall list a few representative statements from each group and then comment on them briefly.

(*i*) *The entities cannot be described*: "The power we call God defies description. . . ."[58]; God is the "mystery of mysteries"[59]; ". . . an indefinable mysterious power that pervades everything. . . ."[60]; "No man has been able to describe God fully . . . God alone is omniscient . . . God is invisible, beyond the reach of the human eye. . . ."[61]; "God is not a person. No one

[55] *Ibid*, 10. XII. 1925.

[56] *Harijan*, 24. VIII. 1934.

[57] In the following I shall use the terms Truth and God as interchangeable. I assume that the reader is familiar with Gandhi's arguments on what led him from his original formulation "God is Truth" to the formulation "Truth is God."

[58] *Ibid.*, 10. XII. 1925.

[59] *Ibid.*, 20. IV. 1934.

[60] *Young India*, 11. X. 1928.

[61] *Harijan*, 3. III. 1946.

can describe Him as no one has seen Him. . . . The author of the *Vedas*, after the profoundest search, has described Him as *Neti-Neti*. . . ."[62]

(*ii*) *The portmanteau statements:* ". . . God is Life, Truth, Light. He is Love. He is the Supreme Good. . ."[63]; ". . . The sum total of *karma* is God. That which impels man to do good is God. That which makes man the plaything of fate is God. . . . He is the denial of the atheist. . ."[64]; ". . . To me God is Truth and Love. God is ethics and morality. God is fearlessness. God is the source of Light and Life and yet He is above and beyond all these. God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist, for in His boundless love God permits the atheist to live. He is the searcher of hearts. He transcends speech and reason. He knows us and our hearts better than we do ourselves. . . . He is a personal God to those who need His touch. He is the purest essence. He simply *Is* to those who have faith. He is all things to all men. He is in us and yet above and beyond us. . ."[65]; ". . . The truth is that God is the force. He is the essence of Life. He is pure and undefiled consciousness. He is eternal. . ."[66]; ". . . that which gives the greatest solace in the midst of the severest fire is God. . . . God is the help of the helpless."[67]

(*iii*) *Tautologies:* There are numerous statements in which the sequence of thought is as follows: everything perishes except God; as a thing which is ephemeral and transient cannot really be said to exist, God alone exists. Thus, "I do dimly perceive that whilst everything around me is ever changing, ever dying, there is underlying all that change a living power that is changeless, that holds together, creates, dissolves and recreates. That informing power or spirit is God. And since nothing else I see merely through the senses can or will persist, He alone is. . . ."[68] Or " . . . the Sanskrit word for Truth is a word which literally means that which exists—*Sat*. . . ."[69] Or, to list yet another version, "In 'God is Truth,' 'is' certainly does not mean 'equal to' nor does it merely mean 'is truthful'. Truth is not a mere attribute of God, but He is That. Truth in Sanskrit means *Sat*. *Sat* means Is. Therefore, Truth is implied in Is. God is, nothing else is. . . ."[71] And again: "God is good not in the sense that X is good. X is comparatively good. He is more good than evil, but God is wholly good. There is no evil in Him. . . God is the Supreme Alchemist. In his presence all iron and dross turn into pure gold. Similarly does all evil turn into good. . . . Therefore, goodness and all it connotes is not an attribute. Goodness is God. . . ."[72]

In another set of statements the sequence is as follows: we can observe that there is order in the Universe; we can thus infer that it is governed by a Law; this Law is God; furthermore, the Law and Law-giver are one. Thus, "There is orderliness in the Universe, there is an unalterable Law governing

[62] *Ibid.*, 16. IV. 1946.
[63] *Young India*, 11. X. 1928.
[64] *Ibid.*, 11. X. 1928.
[65] *Ibid.*, 5. III. 1925.
[66] *Harijan*, 22. VI. 1947.
[67] M.K. Gandhi, *In Search of the Supreme*, Navjivan, 1961, Volume, pp. 22-23.
[68] *Ibid.*, 11: X. 1928.
[69] *Young India*, 4. IV. 1929.
[70] *Ibid.*, 11. X. 1928.
[71] *Harijan*, 27. III. 1949.
[72] *Ibid.*, 24. 8. 1947.

everything and every being that exists or lives. . . That Law then which governs all life is God. Law and the Law-giver are one. . . ."[73] In statements such as these a seeming order is taken to imply a Law and God is *defined as* the Law.

I shall givé only two further examples in which God is just *defined as* a "sameness," a "vital force" or as something else. Thus, ". . . we may all have different definitions for 'God'. . . . But behined all that variety of definitions there would be a certain sameness which would be unmistakable, for the root is one. God is that indefinable something which we all feel but we do not know. . . ."[74] Or " . . . God is the force among all the forces. All other forces are material. But God is the vital force or spirit which is all-pervading, all-embracing and, therefore, beyond human ken."[75]

(*iv*) *Paradoxes:* God is "purely benevolent"; "I call God long-suffering and patient precisely because He permits evil in the world. I know that He has no evil in Him and yet if there is evil, He is the author of it and yet untouched by it. . ."[76]; ". . . I believe God is creative as well as non-creative. . . ."[77]; ". . .He is one and yet many. He is smaller than an atom and bigger than the Himalayas. He is contained in even a drop in the ocean and yet not even the seven seas can encompass Him. . . ."[78]; ". . . He moves all and yet no one can move Him. . . .For Him there is no beginning and no end. . . ."[79]

(*v*) *Statements that indicate the links between these entities and others that were important to him:* I shall illustrate this set with two or three statements that indicate the links between Truth and only one of the other entities that was important to Gandhi, namely, *ahimsa*. "*Ahimsa* and Truth," Gandhi tells us, "are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like the two sides of a coin or rather of a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Who can say which is the obverse and which is the reverse?"[80] On another occasion he says that the relationship between them is that of means to an end: ". . . And when you want to find Truth as God, the only inevitable means is love, i.e., non-violence, and since I believe that ultimately the means and end are convertible terms I should not hesitate to say that God is love."[81] Now, in what sense is *ahimsa* or love a means to Truth? Once again, the answer is in many parts. I shall list only two of them. In Gandhi's view a condition for realizing Truth and God is that we must identify ourselves with every living creature; this is possible only when through love we view every creature as having in him the Truth and God we seek.[82] As a second sense in which Truth and *ahimsa* are related, consider Gandhi's optimism that, even though people have different conceptions of Truth, no great harm can come from each pursuing Truth as he sees it. This optimism rests on his belief that

[73] *Young India*, 11. X. 1928.
[74] *Ibid* , 5. III. 1925.
[75] *Harijan*, 18. VIII. 1946.
[76] *Young India*, 11. X. 1928.
[77] *Ibid.*, 21. I. 1921.
[78] *Ibid.*, 21. I. 1921.
[79] *Harijan*, 16. VI. 1946.
[80] *From Yeravda Mandir*, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.
[81] *Young India*, 21. XII. 1931.
[82] *Ibid.*, 5. V. 1920.

each votary of Truth will soon see *ahimsa* as an essential aspect of it and thus—as all will be pursuing Truth non-violently—the pursuit of none will harm the others. In other words, unless all votaries of Truth are also committed to *ahimsa*, the votaries may end up killing their fellow-men as the supposed votaries of God have done through the ages.[83]

Contribution of Commentators

Authors commenting on and ostensibly carrying further Gandhi's conception of Truth and God have done little more than add a few more adjectives. Thus, for instance, to the adjectives that Gandhi used in connection with Truth, the commentators will add that "it is validity itself," that "it is identical with the Real Self of man," that "it is the entity which comprehends everything," that beauty is the expression of Truth in the world of art (without going further to describe what beauty means except to quote Gandhi's view that entities which are outwordly ugly may still be beautiful), that it is the "sum total of existence" in which all elements of the Universe appear as internally related, that it is Timeless, that it is the Ultimate Reality, that it is the Eternal Principle. Similarly, they will repeat the familiar litany of adjectives about God: that God is validity, that apart from being indescribable, inscrutable, incomprehensible, He is omniscient, transcendental, immanent. Or they will cite a Sanskrit verse or two. But the content of these verses is no more explicit than (in fact, it is no different from) the content of Gandhi's statement whose meaning the commentator is trying to expound.[84]

Critique of Statements

I think that all will readily agree with the following propositions:

(*i*) We do not describe an entity merely by saying that it is beyond reason, that it cannot be described.

(*ii*) We do not make a word more intelligible merely by capitalizing it. Nor do we make it more intelligible by merely using another word unless the latter's meaning is better known or is by itself more explicit. Thus, for instance, it is not very helpful to assert that "Truth (or God) is Validity itself" as the expression "Validity itself" is just as nebulous. Similarly, it does not help matters to assert that "Beauty is the manifestation of Truth in the world of art" unless we go farther and describe what we understand by the word "beauty." I put statements such as "Truth is what pervades all things" or "Truth is what prevails" in the same category. For the meaning of the words "pervades" and "prevails" is not very clear in

[83] *From Yeravda Mandir*, *op. cit*, Chapter 1.

[84] For three representative commentaries from which these adjectives have been culled and to which these comments apply see Surendra Verma, *Metaphysical Foundation of Mahatma Gandhi's Thought*, Longmans, Delhi, 1970; Dhirendra Mohan Datta, *The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1953; Raghavan Iyer, *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi*, Oxford, New York, 1973.

this context. For instance, "pervades" certainly does not mean "common to" in this context. We cannot say, for instance, that the letters ADRW in some sense express the "truth" of the words WARD and DRAW because they are common to them both; nor, for instance, would we want to say that the first syllable of YELL and YELLOW contains their "truth" as it is common to them both. "Prevail" is equally ambiguous for, firstly, when do we know that something has finally "prevailed" ? And, secondly, if an evil (say, Stalin's purges) "prevails," (and they did "prevail" with great finality as far as the victims were concerned) are we justified in asserting with Gandhi and the Upanishadic seers that "God alone Is" ? The special meaning of the word "Is" in this context is not any clearer than that of "God" itself.

As a final illustration consider the following statement of Gandhi: "We are all bound by the ties of love. There is in everything a centripetal force without which nothing could have existed. Scientists tell us that without the presence of the cohesive force among the atoms that comprise this globe of ours, it would crumble to pieces and would cease to exist, and even as there is a cohesive force in blind matter, so must there be in all things animate and inanimate. The name of that cohesive force among all animate beings is love."[85] Two observations come to mind immediately.

Firstly, a statement such as this amounts to no more than assigning a name. It does not communicate the content of the entity—in this case the centripetal force that holds animate beings together; to do so we must go farther than just assigning a name to the entity, we must describe it. Thus, for instance, I may assert that "there is a force which holds black holes together; this force is *psi*," and leave you none the wiser as to what it is which holds the black holes together. I must go farther and—as the astro-physicists are now doing—analyze and describe the force. In the statement of Gandhi that I just cited, for instance, the last word could as well have been Truth or God—either fits the context, either will be in tune with much else that Gandhi wrote as both Truth and God were often equated to love by him—and we would be none the wiser about the force which holds animate beings together.

Secondly, must we conclude from the passage just quoted that the force which holds inanimate things together is different from the force that holds animate beings together? The statement would certainly seem to imply that and yet, in view of Gandhi's insistence that God alone Is, that only one Law governs and animates the Universe, we would have to maintain that, taking Gandhi's metaphysical thought as a whole, indeed only one force binds both the animate and inanimate worlds. Could we then say, in view of the preceding passage, that "Love" holds inanimate things—e.g., black holes—together? And would we be correct in holding on to this assertion even though we are beginning to get a purely physical—in contrast to a metaphysical—explanation of the "force" which accounts for the black

[85] *Young India*, 5. V. 1920.

holes? Moreover, if, in the face of the cruelty we observe in nature, we persist in asserting that it is "Love" which holds inanimate as well as animate entities together, would we not be depriving the word "Love" of all meaning?

The point merely is that in explaining an entity we have to do more than merely assign a word or conjure up equivalent words which are equally opaque.

(*iii*) Similarly, we do not make the meaning of a word more explicit merely by enlisting an equivalent word from another language—for instance, from Sanskrit—unless the latter is by itself clearer because of its associations or the contexts in which it is employed in that language.

(*iv*) We do not explicate the nature of "x" merely by asserting that "x" is "not y." The nature of "x" may not become explicit even if, in statements similar to the statement "x is not y," we have enumerated all the (n-1) "non-x" entities. Thus, for instance, the content of "x" does not become apparent to us from the statement "x is what is left after all the (n-1) non-x categories have been enumerated."

(*v*) A simile does not help explain a word unless the meaning of the simile is clearer. Thus, for instance, we are told that Truth propels itself "like the fragrance of a rose."[86] Now, unless the reader knows how exactly it is that the fragrance of a rose "propels itself" he would be none the wiser. (And in all probability if he really knew how the fragrance of a rose is transmitted he would feel that that is not quite the way in which Gandhi would have us believe Truth propels itself.) Unless the simile is such that its meaning is clearer, it is just a mental switch that we—the speaker and the listener both—turn on to stop thinking.

(*vi*) Finally, paradoxes can serve a useful purpose (e.g., in forcing us to think more coherently about concepts as in logic, or as in the *Koans* of Zen, in making us realize the limits of reason). But by themselves they seldom suffice to explain the content of entities of the kind we are assessing.

I believe that all the illustrative statements of Gandhi about God and Truth that I cited earlier (and, of course, all the statements about these entities by commentators to which I alluded) are covered by one or more of these six propositions.

Lest my claims be taken to be more presumptuous than they are, let me clarify three matters immediately.

First, I am far from questioning the authenticity of Gandhi's religious experience. I am not competent to judge it either way. Indeed, I believe that the course of his life, the enormous fortitude with which he bore severe ordeals testify to an extraordinary—and in this sense authentic—faith. And as a lay reader I can only confess that the extraordinary statements he has recorded—for instance, about the inner voice that he heard before deciding to undertake his 21-day fast in 1933 for the removal of untouchability[87]—ring

[86] D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatama*, Publications Division, Delhi, 1969, Volume 2, p. 450.
[87] *Harijan*, 8. VII. 1933.

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[86] D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatama*, Publications Division, Delhi, 1969, Volume 2, p. 450.
[87] *Harijan*, 8. VII. 1933.

true and authentic to me and are extraordinarily moving. (As does the passion that seethes in Mao's writings—as in his *Report of an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan.*) But the authenticity or otherwise of Gandhi's experiences of Truth and God is not at issue. Nor the sincerity of his faith. The issue is confined to whether or not Gandhi has succeeded in communicating the content of Truth and God to us.

And this brings me to the second point: it may well be that the content of the Ultimate Reality—if such an entity exists—is not communicable. Like so many others, I am in no position to judge the matter. At times Gandhi certainly says that its content is not communicable: "As a matter of fact," he tells us, "we are thinking about the Unthinkable, describing the Indescribable, seeking to know the Unknown and that is why our speech falters, is inadequate and even often contradictory. . . ."[88] If the matter be inherently incommunicable, if it be such that it can only be apprehended directly, then we certainly cannot fault Gandhi for failing as a communicator. But if this is so then we must conclude that it is futile for us to engage in discussions about the concepts, that it is futile for us to comb his writings or those of others for clues to the content of these entities, that it is futile for us to go on inventing new adjectives for these entities and quoting verses about them. We might as well commence our journey from a point from which we can proceed.

A third possibility must be considered: that metaphysical entities like Truth and God are not entirely incommunicable, that while the words Gandhi used to describe them fail to convey much to us, their meaning is apparent to those who have been through similar spiritual experiences. There is little doubt that experience, direct perception, endows unfamiliar words with meaning, that it endows familiar commonplace words with new meaning. Words such as "majesty," expressions such as "silent splendour," acquire a new meaning once one has gazed at the Himalayas. These simple words are no longer just words whose meaning we know intellectually from a dictionary. At their mention their meaning fills our being. It may be that in a similar way Gandhi's descriptions of Truth and God and even the *Neti-neti* description of the Upanishads convey all to the initiated.

Let us assume this to be the case—that Truth and God have a communicable meaning but that the meaning can only be conveyed to the *cognoscenti*. Now, we know and Gandhi always stressed that societies cannot be transformed till the masses are educated, organized and emboldened to work for transforming them. Are we then to assume that as the metaphysical Truth and God are central to Gandhi's systems, that as their meaning can only be conveyed to the initiated, and that as the masses are unlikely by and large to be ready in the foreseeable future to comprehend the concepts—are we to conclude then that little can be done to bring about the transformations that Gandhi desired so intensely and to which he con-

[88] *Young India*, 21. I. 1921.

secrated his life? Surely not. Just posing the question suggests the way out.

The Meaning of Truth and God

Gandhi used to say that while "finite human beings shall never know in its fulness Truth and Love which are in themselves infinite. . . we do know enough for our guidance. . . ."[89] The operational content of Gandhi's Truth and God is just as clear as their metaphysical meaning is nebulous. And Gandhi repeated its operational meaning thousands of times:

> I claim to know my millions. All the twenty-four hours of the day I am with them. They are my first care and last, because I recognize no God except the God that is to be found in the hearts of the dumb millions. They do not recognize his presence; I do. And I worship the God that is Truth or Truth which is God through the service of these millions.[90]

> '. . .You are right,' (he told the students in Mysore), 'in saying in your address that I am endeavouring to see God through service of humanity, for I know that God is neither in heaven nor down below, but in everyone. . . .'[91]

> Prayer, therefore, may be done by any name. A prayerful heart is the vehicle and service makes the heart prayerful. Those Hindus who in this age serve the untouchables from a full heart truly pray; the Hindus and those others who spin prayerfully for the poor and the indigent truly pray.[92]

> A *sannyasin* is one who cares not for himself but cares all his time for others. He has renounced all selfishness. But he is full of selfless activity even as God is full of sleepless and selfless activity. A *Sannyasin*, therefore, to be true to his creed of renunciation must care for *swaraj*, not for his own sake (he has it) but for the sake of others. He has no worldly ambition for himself. That does not mean he may not help others to understand their place in the world. If the *sannyasin*-s of old did not seem to bother their heads about the political life of society, it was because society was differently constructed. But politics properly so-called rules every detail of our lives today. We come in touch, that is to say, with the State on hundreds of occasions whether we wish to or not. The State affects our moral being. A *sannyasin*, therefore, being well-wisher and servant *par excellence* of society, must concern himself with the relations of people with the State; that is to say, he must show the way to the people to attain *swaraj*. . . . A *sannyasin* having attained *swaraj* in his own person is the fittest to show us the way.[93]

[89] *Harijan*, 11. III. 1939.
[90] *Ibid.*, 24. IX. 1925.
[91] *Ibid.*, 21. IV. 1927.
[92] *Young India*, 4. VIII. 1927.
[93] *Ibid.*, 21. V. 1925.

Yajna is sacrifice of one's all for the good of humanity. . . .[94]

I am a humble seeker after Truth. I am impatient to realize myself, to attain *moksha* in this very existence. My national service is part of my training for freeing my soul from the bondage of flesh. . . for the road to salvation lies through incessant toil in the service of my country and therethrough of humanity. . . .[95]

He said that he was being led to Hinduism "through Truth and Non-violence, *i.e.*, love in the broadest sense," that Hinduism for him "is the religion of humanity and includes the best of all religions known to me." "The bearing of this religion on social life is, or has to be, seen in one's daily social conduct. To be true to such religion one has to lose oneself in continuous and continuing service to all. . . .Hence for me there is no escape from social service, there is no happiness on earth beyond or apart from it. Social service here must be taken to include every department of life. . . .[96]

I see in the fellowship with (the masses) the God I adore. I derive from that fellowship all my consolation. If I had not realized that bond (the bond between him and the masses 'which defies description but which is felt alike by them and me') in South Africa now fully thirty years ago, life would not be worth living for me. But I know that whether I live in the *Ashram* or whether in their midst, I work for them, think of them and pray for them. I want to live only for them and so for myself.[97]

No one has a right to live at all unless it is a life of service. . . .[98]

Man's ultimate aim is the realization of God. . . .The immediate service of all human beings becomes a necessary part of the endeavour simply because the only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and be one with it. This can only be done by service of all. And this cannot be done except through one's country. I am a part and parcel of the whole and I cannot find Him apart from the rest of humanity. My countrymen are my nearest neighbours. They have become so helpless, so resourceless, so inert that I must concentrate on serving them. . . .[99]

My God is myriad-formed and while sometimes I see Him in the spinning wheel, at other times I see Him in communal unity, then again in removal of untouchability; and; and that is how I establish communion with Him according as the Spirit moves me. . . .[100]

[94] *Harijan*, 3.V. 1942.
[95] *Young India*, 3. IV. 1924.
[96] *In Search of the Supreme*, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, pp. 265-266.
[97] *Young India*, 7. I. 1926.
[98] *Harijan*, 29. VI. 1947.
[99] *Ibid.*, 29. VIII. 1936.
[100] *Ibid.*, 8. V. 1937.

And he would not let sophistry about the world being or not being *maya* become an excuse for not serving his fellow men:

> The poet, however, has proceeded to call the world an illusion and a dream. Joy or what men call happiness may be, as it really is, a dream in a fleeting and transitory world, where everything is like a dissolving phantasmagoria. But we cannot dismisss the suffering of our fellow creatures as unreal and thereby provide a moral alibi for ourselves. Even dreams are true while they last and to the sufferer his suffering is a grim reality. Anyway, whether the world be real or unreal, we have certain duties in life which must be faced, understood and duly performed while we are in this world....[101]

Gandhi reformulated many popularly accepted notions of the Hindus—about the ultimate purpose of one's life, about the meaning of salvation, about the means for attaining the goal, about the autonomy of an individual—Gandhi reformulated these and other notions in a radical manner. In fact, his talking of Truth, his positing God as Truth and Truth as God, his insistence that the individual has the right, duty and the capacity to seach for Truth on his own (instead, *e.g.* of relying on the scriptures or on priests and *guru*-s), this, as we have seen, was itself a progressive reformulation. Similarly, his insistence that salvation could only mean the salvation of humanity, that the way for an individual to seek salvation was to work for the emancipation of his fellow men—these two were progressive reformulations. To insist now that metaphysical concepts such as Truth and God whose meanings are incomprehensible or whose meanings can be known to only a handful, to insist that these constitute the kingpin of his system is to deny his heritage. It is even to minimize his contribution to the Hindu philosophical tradition. In trying to understand the message of Gandhi's life and teaching we must, therefore, put Truth and God aside for a while and focus on human emancipation as the goal to which we must consecrate ourselves.

Objections from the Orthodox

"But Gandhi without Truth and God would not be Gandhi." This is precisely the kind of knee-jerk reaction that we must avoid. In what sense would Gandhi not be Gandhi? He would still be the greatest emancipator in our history thus far, he would still be the most original social thinker that we have had since the Buddha, he would still be the one who reformulated the Hindu tradition radically.

"The letter killeth and in finding fault with Gandhi's formulations of Truth and God you are going by the letter." Once again a phrase is being repeated without taking the trouble to specify its meaning. Far from going by the letter, I have gone precisely to the spirit of what lies behind the

[101] *Ibid.*, 21.7.1946.

words, the spirit that animates all of Gandhi's life and teaching.

"But Truth and God are essential for imparting legitimacy to the proximate goals Gandhi was trying to achieve."[102] Surely human emancipation is a goal that can stand without props—it certainly could for Gandhi. For his followers to insist that it needs to be dressed up or propped up is disingenuous. By doing so they violate and camouflage the central message of Gandhi's life.

"But devotion to Truth ensures the fulfilment of other vows. Recognition of a power infinitely higher than oneself induces humility."[103] There are two senses in which commitment to Truth can be said to ensure the fulfilment of other vows. In one sense, the vow of Truth can be said to *imply* the other vows—*e.g.*, the vow of fearlessness. Gandhi often defines the vow of Truth in this comprehensive sense. But surely this is just a matter of defining Truth in one way rather than another. If we were to vow to work for human emancipation and if we stood by this vow then surely we would also be doing all the other things that would be required to make us fit instruments for the struggle; thus, for instance, commitment to the cause of human emancipation would *imply* that we be fearless, that we be prepared to bear all sacrifices and so on. The second sense in which the commitment to Truth or God can be said to ensure the fulfilment of the other vows is that the former encourages one, motivates one to abide by the latter. But surely it is not commitment to the Absolute but absolute commitment to a cause which transcends parochial interests and it is this absolute commitment which induces us to abide by all the rules that hone us into better instruments. After all—and Gandhi himself was explicit on this point—vows are not meant just for the sake of vows. They are meant to steel us for the struggle, for serving a cause. As for humility, the struggle for human emancipation, working and learning from the masses, identifying ourselves with them, learning to summarize their experience for them, reflecting on the contrast between our social practice and what is entailed by the commitment to the emancipation of our countrymen, comparing the miniscule results of whatever it is that we do with the enormous lot that needs to be done—all this will surely make anyone of us humble.

"But Truth sustains one. The assurance that in the end it shall surely prevail gives us the courage to stay the course." The assurance that in the end one's cause shall prevail is indeed indispensable at crucial points. But a blind faith in a concept whose meaning we do not understand is not the

[102]This is what Raghavan Iyer seems to be saying when he asserts that "... the ever existent Absolute Truth was essential to Gandhi for the purpose of endowing truth, as commonly understood, with indispensable and universal sanctity as the highest moral value and the highest human end" (Iyer, *op. cit.*, p. 151).

[103]Thus, on the first point, to cite Raghavan Iyer again: "Nothing short of the Absolute could justify his insistence on absolute values and induce the sacrifices and self-purificatory discipline that Gandhi required of those who wished to become heroic leaders and men of conscience, determined to revolutionize the existing political and social order" (*ibid.*, pp. 163-164).

only way of acquiring the confidence that is so necessary for protracted struggles. In fact, it is not even a desirable way. For blind faith keeps us from analyzing the concrete situation in which we are placed, from identifying the factors in it that give reason for hope and those which give reason for alarm and which have to be combated. A blind faith is often the surest means to complacent resignation.

"But concepts such as Truth and God alone move our people; weaned as they are on superstition and what not, they respond only to concepts such as these." Such a cynical view implies great contempt for our people. Cynicism apart, I would argue that even from the purely utilitarian point of view—that of devising a handle by which to mobilize our people—concepts such as Truth and God should be consciously shunned. And this is so for three reasons.

The first of these is precisely that our people have been weaned on religiosity of various kinds. This religiosity reinforces various elements of false consciousness in our collective psyche. Gandhi did a great deal to reformulate many elements of our world-view: recall, for instance, his activist interpretation of specific notions like *karma* and of the Hindu ethos in general. But his own example has shown that the reformulations are soon forgotten. The net residual effect of using the religious idiom to mobilize our people is only to reinforce in their minds the religiosity from which the reformer wanted to liberate them; they forget the reformulations; all they remember is that yet another great man gave a certificate to religion—and by "religion" they understand their religiosity and the world-view associated with it.

Second, the habitual use of words like Truth and God inhibits communication. A leader—even a great leader—often gets into the habit of using some words which are self-evident to him but whose meaning is at best amorphous to the masses he wants to educate. He uses them as a shorthand and thereby fails to explain the issue at hand to his people. The cause suffers. Of course, Gandhi is not alone in this. To cite just one instance, Mao's use of the expressions "dialectic," "the unity of opposites" and "contradictions" has at times the same effect. Often he uses the concepts so freely and so loosely as not only to fail to explain the issue at hand but also to rob the concepts of much of their meaning: "fearing and not fearing, being happy and being unhappy, solving problems and not solving them, this is dialectics. . . ."; "The sky and the earth are the unity of opposites. . . ."; "Hard battle and rest and consolidation are the unity of opposites, This is the law. They are also mutually transformable. There is not anything which is not mutually transformable. High speed turns into low speed, and low speed turns into high speed. Labour turns into rest and rest turns into labour. Rest and consolidation and hard battle are also like this. Labour and rest and high speed and low speed also have identity. Getting out of bed and going to bed are also the unity of opposites. An old saying goes: 'He who has slept for a long time thinks of getting up.' Sleeping transforms into getting up and getting up transforms into sleeping. Opening a meeting

transforms into closing a meeting"; "Sons transform into fathers and fathers transform into sons. Females transform into males and males transform into females. Direct transformation is not possible. But after marriage when sons and daughters are begotten, is that not transformation?"; "Life and death are mutually transformable. Life transforms into death and lifeless things transform into living things. . . ."[104] Are words not being robbed of meaning?

The third reason from this utilitarian point of view is that the continuing use of words such as Truth and God—the continuing use of the religious idiom in general—keeps many away from Gandhi, many who are otherwise dedicated to his cause of emancipating our people and who have much to learn from him.[105]

There is one other utilitarian consideration that is associated with concepts like Truth and God which the orthodox Gandhians may hesitate

[104]I could go on. But the reader will find it a useful exercise to go through some of Mao's later writings and recorded speeches and list the number of senses in which he uses concepts such as dialectics, unity of opposites, contradictions. Stuart Schram's collection *Mao Tse-tung Unrehearsed* (Penguin, 1974) and *Miscellany of Mao Tse-tung's Thought*, Volumes 1 and 2 (National Translation Service, Department of Commerce, Arlington, 1974) will prove ample for this exercise. In a formal sense each of the statements quoted in the text is perfectly respectable in terms of dialectical theory. In the passages Mao can be said to be illustrating a number of dialectical concepts: (*i*) the notion that these concepts are universally applicable; (*ii*) the notion that what is death from one point of view is life from another; (*iii*) the notion that one thing evolves into another; that quantitative changes lead to qualitative transformations; (*iv*) the notion that each thing or state has in itself the elements that will transform it into its opposite; and so on. The point, however, is that the examples I have cited do not occur in a theoretical exposition of dialectics. They are taken from occasions when Mao is discussing a practical issue and his mind wanders off into these reveries and then returns to the subject at hand with a fully-formed conclusion. The interim steps in the reasoning thus remain uncommunicated. Moreover, one can imagine how such casual formulations might have occasioned banter in the wings: "Setting up Li Shao-chi and then getting rid of him, setting up Lin Piao and then getting rid of him, denouncing Teng Hsiao-ping, then resurrecting him, then denouncing him, and then resurrecting him once again—this too is dialectics. . . ."

[105]Are we guilty of *lese majeste* in introducing such a crass utilitarian consideration into our discussion of Gandhi's Truth and God? I think not. As the practical leader of a movement, Gandhi too weighed his formulations by assessing, among other things, their likely effect on different groups of followers. Let me just cite one passage: "I came to that conclusion (that Truth is God) after a continuous and relentless search after Truth which began nearly fifty years ago. I then found that the nearest approach to Truth was through love. But I also found that love has so many meanings in the English language at least . . . . I found too that love in the sense of *ahimsa* had a limited number of votaries in the world. But I never found a double meaning in connection with Truth and not even atheists had demurred to the power or necessity of Truth . . . . I would automatically disarm his (the atheist's) criticism by saying that Truth is God, as I have disarmed criticisms of many a young man . . . ." (*Young India*, 31.12.31). Similarly, we find Gandhi's associates discussing with him whether one formulation rather than another (for instance, whether the substitution of Truth for God) would motivate more people; see, for instance, *The Diary of Mahadev Desai*, Navajivan, Ahmedabad, 1953, 1:61.

to raise but which we might as well consider because it was of some operational consequence in Gandhi's political dealings. The leader of a movement needs to retain with himself the prerogative of ultimately settling an issue. Intellectual formulations of one kind or another often help the leader fortify this prerogative. Thus, for instance, we find Lenin retaining this prerogative by the implicit assertion that he is the best judge of whether or not the situation is ripe for a bold thrust. The reader will see the process at work by reading two of his famous tracts. *What Is To Be Done* and *Left Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, consecutively. Similarly, while Mao methodically lists different types of contradictions—in his famous essay, *On Contradictions*, and in his 1957 address, *On The Correct Handling of Contradictions Among The People*—the reader will search in vain for precise criteria by which he can identify what the principal contradiction is in a given situation, what the principal aspect of the contradiction is; he will not easily come by criteria that might help him judge whether a contradiction, or an aspect of it, is antagonistic or not; nor will he be able to determine on his own when a contradiction (for instance, a conflict between two ideological lines) which started out as a non-antagonistic contradiction becomes an antagonistic one.[106] Similarly, he will be hard put to determine the precise operational balance implicit in dialectical concepts such as "democratic centralism" and "people's democratic dictatorship"; in a given situation, is a bit more decentralization or a bit more centralism compatible with the concepts, a bit more people's democracy or a bit more people's dictatorship? The touchstone for settling these issues and hence the prerogative of deciding how one must proceed at the critical juncture, Mao reserves for himself. Now in Gandhi's case Truth and God, unconsciously perhaps, served a similar purpose. Once they were brought in the matter was settled; there was no further scope for argument.

Numerous instances can be given. I must confine myself to one or two. The reader will recall the helplessness—and exasperation—of interlocutors like Wavell when they were faced with a Gandhi invoking Truth and God. When someone warned him that his fasts were incomprehensible and that they were liable to lose him goodwill (in this case among his sympathizers in England) Gandhi's response was typical: "...in spite of all the wish to stand well with my English friends, I am really helpless in this matter. I am not responsible for these fasts. I do not undertake them for my amusement. I would not torture the flesh for the love of fame. . . .(A higher Power

[106]Such criteria as are listed can be interpreted in many ways; for instance, we are told that contradictions with our enemies are antagonistic and those among the people are non-antagonistic; but what happens when, as in the 1957 address cited in the text, we are told that "the term 'the people' has different meanings in different countries and in different historical periods. At this stage of building socialism, all classes, strata and social groups that approve, support and work for the cause of socialist construction belong to the category of people, while those social forces that resist the socialist revolution and are hostile and try to wreck socialist construction are enemies of the people?"

prompts me to undertake them and He alone sustains me through them.). I can only plead with that Power that He may not put me through any more ordeals of that nature. But if my pleading goes in vain and another fast comes my way, I must undertake it, even though I may have to risk a wreckage of all the reputation I may possess for sanity and what not. 'For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul'."[107] Similarly, when the Unity Conference passed a resolution expressing regret at Gandhi's decision to fast and requesting him not to do so, his response in a letter to Motilal Nehru was predictable: ". . . .The causes of the fast are much deeper than I can explain in this note. . . .The fast is, therefore, a matter between God and myself and I would, therefore, not only ask you to forgive me for not breaking it but would ask you even to encourage me and pray for me that it may end successfully...I would, therefore, urge the meeting to transmute all personal affection...into solid, earnest and true work for unity for which the Conference has met."[108] And he gave the following general counsel to his followers: "Rightly or wrongly, I know that I have no other resource as a *satyagrahi* than the assistance of God in every conceivable difficulty and I would like it to be believed that what may appear to be inexplicable actions of mine are really due to inner promptings."[109]

Thus, even if it is not the leader's intentional purpose, concepts such as Truth and God serve the ancillary purpose of preserving for the leader the prerogative of ultimately settling an issue. However, we can scarcely argue that these concepts should be retained just for this reason. As we have noticed above in the case of Lenin and Mao, other concepts have proved equally serviceable. We can rest assured that a man who comes to lead a great movement will be resourceful enough to find ways—and concepts, if these prove necessary—for maintaining his autonomy.

Emancipation as the Goal

The argument thus far has been that we should put Truth and God aside for a while and posit human emancipation as a goal in itself. Now, much debate and analysis are needed for elucidating the content of emancipation, for thinking out the conditions—the precise relations between man and man, man and nature, man and the man-made social world—under which mankind in the large will be free to develop its capabilities to the fullest. And a great deal of work needs to be done on assessing the instruments by which these conditions can be brought about. Debating and analyzing these matters will raise the participants' consciousness in ways which are relevant to achieving this all-important goal. Inventing adjectives for Truth and God will do little—even for realizing Truth and God.

Discussing matters relevant to the goal of emancipation even in a preliminary way will require a great deal of space and will take us far from the

[107] *Harijan*, 24. VIII. 1934.
[108] *Harijan*, 11.III.1939.
[109] *Young India*. 2.X.1924.

theme of this essay. I can do no more than mention two or three points summarily to indicate the kinds of questions that will at once engage our attention when we shift the focus from Truth and God to human emancipation.

The first thing we will notice is that Gandhi had many useful things to say about the conditions under which alone human beings will be able to develop their capabilities to the fullest. The second thing that we will notice is that the things that Gandhi had to say on this matter were firmly grounded in the Hindu tradition, that, in fact, they represent an excellent example of the creative development and application of that tradition.

Consider, for instance, the principles around which he would organize an alternative to modern civilization. There are three such principles. First, in Gandhi's civilization each unit will be governed by inner prompting instead of external direction; the higher units, instead of lording it over the lower units, will be accountable to the latter. It is on this basis that Gandhi opposes the arming of the State; such arming makes it impossible for units within it to bring it to heel. It is on this basis that he opposes violence—which is but the most overt form of external direction. It is on this basis that he was always repelled by rigid organizational structures—for they invariably ossify and thus preclude units lower down from monitoring and regulating units higher up. The second principle is restraint. It is on this basis that he urges austerity and spiritual inwardness and urges us to shun the consumerism that characterizes modern civilization. It is on this basis that he urges a set-up in which each unit makes the minimum demands on other units. In the case of man as an individual this would mean that he should minimize his wants. In the case of a community it would mean that it should be as self-reliant as possible. (Incidentally, to his way of thinking this self-reliance, this restraint, was the *sine qua non* for standing upto higher levels of authority—I can stand up to the higher levels only to the extent that I do not depend on them). The third principle was that every unit must be suffused by a sense of purpose that transcends its interests and that this purpose must be the well-being of the least, of the weakest, the purpose of *antyodaya*.[110] In this alternative civilization every development (a new technology, for instance), every institution would be assessed by the contribution it makes to the well-being of the least, every individual would be judged and would judge himself by the extent to which this purpose—*antyodaya*—suffuses his practice.

The reader who has followed the discussion in the previous chapters will see at once that the first two principles flow directly from the interiority, the inner-directedness that, as we have seen, was so central to the tradition. But he will also see how Gandhi retrieved the tradition from its excess, the excess of stressing inwardness to such an extent as to deny empirical relations. The third is a principle that Gandhi, basing himself on his own ex-

[110]On all this, see M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Navjivan, Ahmedabad, 1962; also compare T.K. Mahadevan, *Dvija*, East West Affiliated Press, Madras, 1976, *et passim*.

perience and on the teachings of a long line of India's poet-saints, grafts on to what we have earlier seen to be the dominant view in the Hindu tradition. Here we see Gandhi extending the tradition by the subtle redefinitions and changes in emphasis that were so characteristic of him. He identifies his "self" with the "selves" of all his fellowmen, with the "self" of all creation and affirms that he will be able to realize his "self" only by helping liberate all other beings, only by helping establish a harmonious relation between man and man, between man and nature. Whereas the concept of the Atman had led the seers to seek to lose themselves in the abstract Brahman, whereas it had led them to turn so far inwards as to deny the importance, nay, the very existence, of the empirical world, Gandhi redefines the same concept so that it becomes the argument for waging the struggles of this world, for waging struggles that would ensure our empirical emancipation.

The third thing we notice about Gandhi's observations about the conditions under which human potential can be best developed is that he has much more to say about these matters than, for instance, Marx. Experience of the last fifty years has shown that aspects of alienation, for instance, which Marx correctly saw would inevitably characterize capitalist societies —and which constituted for Marx a severe indictment of the capitalist system—also characterize post- or at least non-capitalist societies such as the Soviet Union. And the question has recently been raised whether Marx was not aiming at the wrong target—at capitalism instead of at the large-scale organization of production.[111]

Reflections such as this one bring us rapidly to Gandhi's views about industrial society—about location, size, technology, bread labour and a host of other concepts. The point here is not that he said the last word on the subject, but that in retrospect he seems to have raised the relevant questions and even provided some useful hints about the likely answers.

Just as Gandhi's views about the ultimate conditions seem so current and relevant, I believe that his views about the instruments by which change can be brought about will turn out to require reappraisal and substantial modification. Once again I can do no more here than hint at a question or two.

While Gandhi's practice did not, some of his words could be taken to imply that all that the right, the Truth, needed for it to come to prevail was to be proclaimed, that constructive work by a handful of dedicated workers or the example of a single perfected *satyagrahi* would change matters. The life and work of Vinoba has been predicated on assumptions such as these. But will the whole not swamp the parts?

Is it enough for us to dedicate ourselves to embroidering a part of the cloth—however well we embroider it—when the whole cloth is burning? Instead, should we not reason, as Gandhi reasons in the passage about the *sannyasin* cited earlier, as follows: the whole determines the parts; the whole is in practice represented by the State apparatus; hence the first and over-

[111]John Plamenatz, *Karl Marx's Philosophy of Man*, Oxford University Press, 1975, *et passim.*

riding task is to capture the State apparatus. Once *this viewpoint* is adopted our perception of constructive work, of individual struggles changes completely—*each of them is to be viewed now as a vehicle for driving those* lessons home to the people which are required for their representatives' capturing the State apparatus and for their bringing the State apparatus to heel; each struggle or campaign would be viewed thus rather than as an end in itself. Gandhi's perception about the *satyagraha*-s he led—in Champaran, Bardoli, Kheda, etc.—differs dramatically in this respect from the perception of latter-day Gandhians, like Vinoba, of the import of campaigns (such as Bhoodan) that they have led.[112]

Or consider the question that has been asked about Rousseau: is not ought impotent? Can large groups of individuals be persuaded to transcend their class interests merely by moral exhortation? Gandhi's trusteeship ideal has been before us for at least two-thirds of a century. Has it affected the conduct of owners of property in India? Is Gandhi's optimism about being able to alter the conduct of large groups through *hridaya-parivartan* just the illusion typical of the *petit bourgeois*, the illusion that he can levitate above classes?[113] Was Gandhi led to exhortations such as trusteeship by his way of looking at society? Was he led to these by the fact that he viewed *society as consisting of molecules called individuals each of* whom had a spark of divinity in him and each of whom would, therefore, ultimately listen to reason, each of whom would ultimately follow good example? Does our experience indicate that society should be viewed in

[112]I have dealt with some aspects of this matter in *Seminar*, New Delhi, October, 1975.

[113]The reader will recall Lukacs' comment and wonder whether it was not penned with Gandhi in mind: "The *question of consciousness may make its appearance in* terms of the objectives chosen or in terms of action, as for instance in the case of the *petit bourgeoisie*. This class lives at least in part in the capitalist big city and every aspect of its existence is directly exposed to the influence of capitalism. *Hence it* cannot possibly remain wholly unaffected by the fact of class conflict between bourgeoisie and proletariat. But as a 'transitional class in which the interests of two other classes become simultaneously blunted...' it will imagine itself 'to be above all class antagonisms.' Accordingly it will search for ways whereby it will 'not indeed eliminate the two extremes of capital and wage labour, but will weaken their antagonism and transform it into harmony.' In all decisions crucial for society its actions will be irrelevant and it will be forced to fight for both sides in turn but always without consciousness. *In so doing its own objectives—which exist exclusively in its* own consciousness—must become progressively weakened and increasingly divorced from social action. Ultimately they will assume purely 'ideological' forms. The *petit bourgeoisie* will only be able to play an active *role in history* as long as these objectives happen to coincide with the real economic interests of capitalism. This was the case with the abolition of feudal estates during the French Revolution. With the fulfilment of this mission its utterances, which for the most part remain unchanged, in form, become more and more remote from real events and turn finally into mere caricatures (this was true, *e.g.*, of the Jacobinism of the Montagne 1848-51)." George Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*, M.I.T. Press, Boston, 1971, pp. 59-60.

terms of individuals or that it should be viewed in terms of larger aggregates, such as classes?

Was Gandhi a Rousseau, a Tolstoy? Was he typical of the great thinker who appears during the transition from feudalism to capitalism, who because of his perpicacity is able to visualize, the ill that capitalism will do but who, as he does not shed the basic assumptions of capitalism, ends up urging the impotent ought, whose furious rage at what is unfolding ends up as futile imprecation, whose blueprints for the future turn out in the end to be mere nostalgia for an imagined past?[114]

Next, if struggles are unavoidable the question of non-violence certainly has to be opened up again. Who proclaims the ideal of non-violence most vehemently today? The answer is plain: the rulers and the ruling classes who do not hesitate one bit to use arms themselves but insist that the people should remain non-violent. Is the matter to be settled by quotations from Gandhi and Christ or is to be settled by watching the behaviour of the rulers and the ruling classes the world over? Should the Gandhian ideal of non-violence not be reinterpreted to mean that the quantum of overall violence in a society is to be reduced? And if violence (and I am using the term in the comprehensive sense in which Gandhi used it, *i.e.*, as implying all forms of inequity, injustice and tyranny) is so deeply embedded in a society, if it is so institutionalized in it that only a violent upheaval will eliminate it, must the violent upheaval then not be held to be desirable?[115] The reader must remember that simplistic arguments will not do. It will not do, for instance, to excavate some quotations from Gandhi suggesting that violent revolutions are to be shunned because they always result in the establishment of bureaucratic dictatorships as in the Soviet Union. Are we then to argue that, on the same reasoning, non-violent revolutions are to be shunned for they invariably lead to the India of the seventies?

My purpose here is not to settle these questions. It is merely to hint at the sort of questions that at once come to the forefront once we shift our focus from nebulous concepts such as Truth and God to the goal of human emancipation; and to suggest that these questions arise naturally from reflecting upon Gandhi's life, struggles and teaching and that on each of them Gandhi has many useful things to say, some of which carry greater insight than the remarks of other social thinkers and some of which need substantial modification.

A Gandhian Condition

"But what about the thousands and thousands of passages in which Gandhi said that Truth and God were the *leitmotiv* of his life?"

[114] Cf. Lenin's articles on Tolstoy, reproduced in D. Craig (ed.), *Marxists on Literature*, Penguin, 1975, pp. 346-362. The literature on Rousseau is vast. On the specific point of the text see I. Meszaros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation*, Merlin, London, 1975, pp. 27-65, *et passim*.

[115] See Arvind Sharma, "Ahimsa, An Exploratory Re-interpretation," *Gandhi Marg*, January, 1976.

The best way to assess the message of a man—even of a great *man—is* not necessarily to go by his opinion of himself Moreover, I believe that Gandhi himself would never raise a question of this sort. The question implicitly asks us to treat his writings as scripture. Our answer to it can perhaps best be given by recalling our discussion of Gandhi's attitude to the scriptures.

His attitude to the scriptures, as we saw, was twofold. The first aspect will provide an answer to the question and the second will indicate the sort of comment that Gandhi himself might have made if an argument such as the one that has just been sketched had been presented to him.

The first aspect of his attitude to the scriptures was that he refused to accept them as an infallible guide just on faith. Similarly, he would not want us to adopt a slavish attitude towards his teaching. He would not want us to abdicate our reason, our duty to think for ourselves.

The second aspect of his attitude to questioning the scriptures (as to claims of hearing the inner voice) was that only the one who was himself engaged in the search for Truth, only the one who had honed himself into a spiritual instrument could claim to have the authority to question and amend the scriptures or to hear the inner voice. So I suspect that if he were told that we planned to jettison Truth and God from his system and to focus directly on human emancipation, he would in his gentle manner probably tell us that he would recognize our authority to do so if, but only if, we were ourselves engaged in the struggle for human emancipation even as he was, if and only if we had consecrated our all to the struggle even as he had. He would want to make sure that we had been led to this formulation, to the need for this formulation, as a result of our experiments in the course of the struggle itself and not by mere arm-chair cogitation.

And surely this is an eminently reasonable condition.

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